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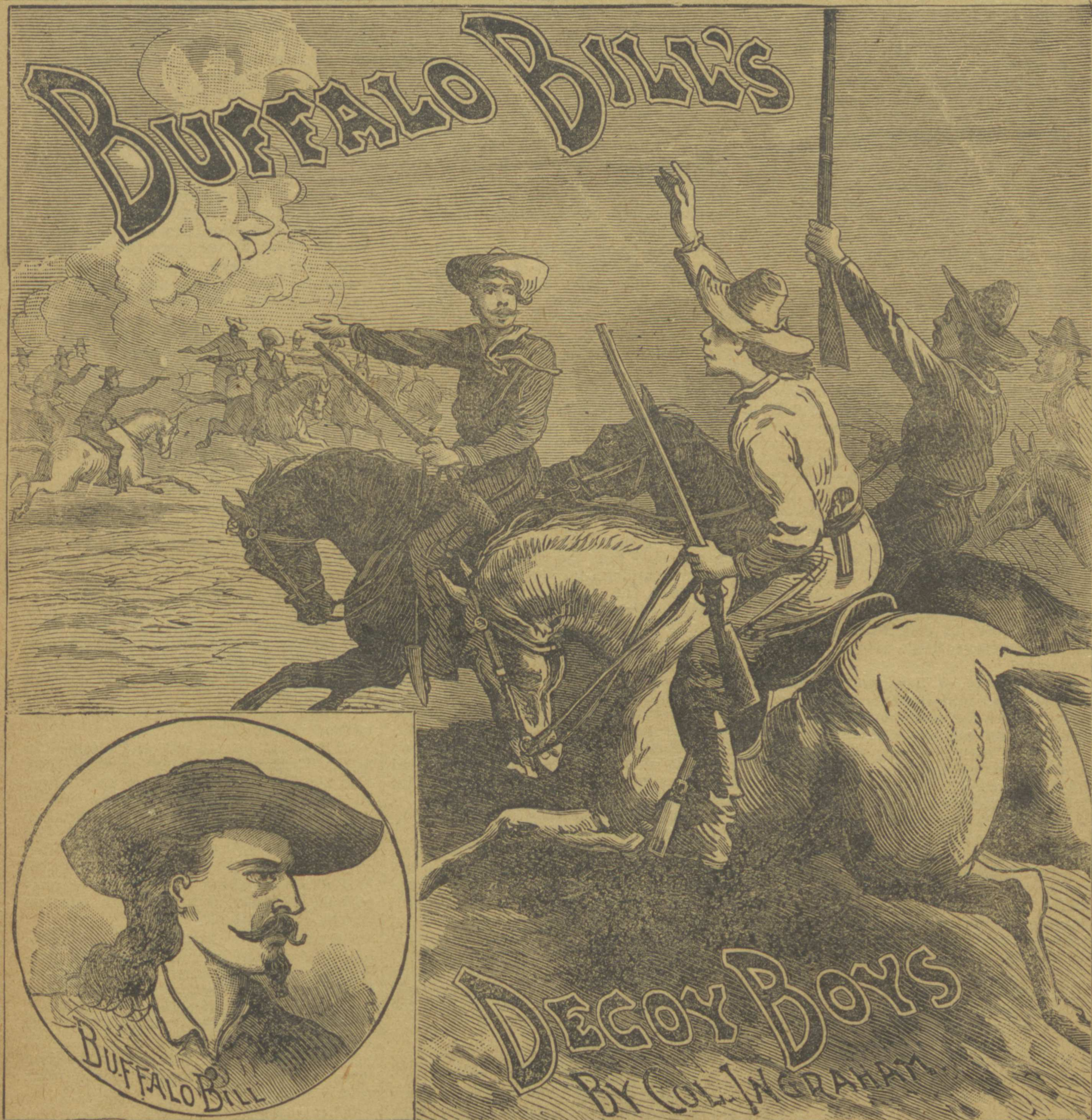
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"RIDE FOR IT, BOY PARDS," SAID BUFFALO BILL, "AND WE'LL CHECK THAT FIGHT."

Buffalo Bill's Decoy Boys;

OR,

The Death-Rivals of the Big Horn.

A Story of the Great Scout's Strong
Hand in Forcing a Triple Peace.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF A VENDETTA.

"Buffalo Bill has either got to die by my hand, or he will kill me. I feel that in my bones, Hal."

"Don't be a fool, Willis, to buck against that man, Buffalo Bill. Why, you are but a boy!"

"A boy, yes; in the eyes of the law, yet a man in stature, in feeling, heart and hatred."

"I was born to avenge wrong or die, and leave others to avenge me."

"What has Buffalo Bill got to do with our vendetta, begun a couple of generations ago, and now transplanted out here to this new country where we have made our homes?"

"Again I say, Willis Wynkoop, don't be a fool and bring Buffalo Bill into the quarrel of the Wynkoops and Duncans, or he will dig your grave for you, sure."

"I did not bring him into it. He chipped in himself, and must take the consequences."

"Or, you must!"

"Yes, one of us must go under."

"In the name of common sense, how did he chip in, Willis?"

"I'll quickly tell you."

"Ned Duncan, the slayer of my brother Ralph, back in Kansas, as you know, and I met by merest chance one Sunday while our emigrant train and his were on the march out here."

"That betrayed to each of us the secret, which neither had suspected, that the Duncans and the Wynkoops, with their large following, to escape the further deadly results of the vendetta between us, had recently pulled up stakes in Kansas and started for the Wild West."

"That was a remarkable coincidence, I admit, and that our trains should have camped within a dozen miles of each other out here, in this wilderness, and now be settled a little over a hundred miles apart."

"But, outside of you and myself of our party, and Ned Duncan of his party, nobody knows the fact, so we need never meet, and thus the vendetta will die out."

"Not if I have my way, Hal Halpine; but, listen to my story."

"I'm listening."

"Well, a meeting between Ned Duncan and myself could mean but one thing—a fight to the death."

"We arranged for a duel, and lo! up rides this Buffalo Bill, and he would not have it."

"Ned Duncan demanded that we should neither of us speak a word to betray the presence of our people so near each other, and Buffalo Bill forced me to agree to it."

"How could he force you?"

"Never mind how, but he did."

"You remember it was the same day that my sister Hilda rode away from camp, got lost and came in at night with her horse badly hurt by a mountain lion springing upon him?"

"Yes."

"Well, she also met Ned Duncan, curse

him! and he shot the lion, or Hilda would have been killed by it."

"Thank God!"

"I would rather she had been killed than owe her life to the slayer of our brother."

"Willis Wynkoop, that is unworthy of you, of any one. Ned Duncan, as his people before him have been, is the foe of the Wynkoops and their following; he did kill your brother Ralph; but give the devil his due, for he acted only in self-defense, when Ralph attacked him; that you know. Ned is said to be a noble young fellow, and has a fine record."

"Curse his record! What is it to me? I tell you he has got to answer to me."

"You are getting a pretty large contract on your hands, Willis, and our Boy Regulators of Wynkoop settlement will have to advise their captain to go slow in this matter."

"I shall heed no advice; but as you heard and saw what passed awhile since, I wish to put you straight in the matter."

"Go ahead."

"Obeying Ned Duncan, Hilda did not tell the secret of the Duncans being near, while I also was silent on the subject."

"Buffalo Bill went on to our camp with me, that day, you remember, denounced our guide, Scott Jerome, as a renegade traitor, leading us into a trap and—"

"Which he was, and but for Buffalo Bill guiding us, and then going to the fort for aid, the renegade would have entrapped us with those Indians he had lying in ambush for us."

"Well, I know all about that, but, as Scott Jerome was killed in the fight that followed, that ends him. Buffalo Bill guided us to where we are now located, and a beautiful valley it is, too; but he told Ned Duncan, when he heard the story of our feud, to have his guide take them to a certain point far from us."

"While you scouted around until you found it and then got me to come with you to lie in wait for Ned Duncan, whom you had discovered went gold hunting, and—"

"Yes, and when we had him at our mercy Buffalo Bill again chips in and thwarts me."

"And glad I am that he did, for I'll tell you now, Willis, I was wrong to be led by you into this ugly business, and am ashamed that the great scout caught me doing underhand work."

"I have the same grudge or family enmity against Ned Duncan that you have; but he is a manly fellow, faced us both unflinchingly, when we held him up, and but for the scout we would have killed him."

"I am heartily glad we did not, and I shall return to our valley and keep the secret from our people that the Duncans are settled out West here; also, this vendetta should end, as your father and all others in your family are anxious that it should."

"Yes, they agree to a cowardly back-down, but I do not."

"I warn you that Buffalo Bill has taken sides now, and does not wish the two settlements to meet, as he has been told the story of the feud, and I tell you he will watch you mighty close, so beware!"

"And I tell you, Hal Halpine, that this feud shall not die out," was the savage reply of the youth looking fiercely at his comrade, also a youth, as the two rode side by side over a boundless plain in the then almost pathless Wild West.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOUT AND HIS BOY PARD.

Two horsemen had sat quietly in their saddles, as the two youths, whose conversation has just been made known,

rode away from the spot which had very nearly proved fatal to one of the four, if not to more.

One of the two now mentioned was a man of striking appearance in face, form and general make up. His hair was long, falling below his broad shoulders; his face dark and strikingly handsome; a mustache and imperial gave him a military air; while his horse was a fine one, well equipped. Altogether, man and beast were superbly typical of the far frontier.

The man was Buffalo Bill—W. F. Cody—at the time I write a Chief of Scouts at Fort Fetterman.

His companion was a youth of eighteen, good-looking, and promising to be very handsome in face and form when he had fully crossed the threshold of manhood.

Already his countenance was stamped with decision and courage beyond his years, and his eyes had in them the expression of a strong, yet noble nature.

He was dressed in a suit of jeans, top boots, slouch hat, was well armed, and sat on his horse as one perfectly at home in the saddle.

This youth was Ned Duncan, son of the leader of the Valley Farms Settlement, as it was named.

Young as he was he had been made to know that the bitter feud between the Duncan-Wynkoop factions might demand his life at any time.

It had already been demanded, but a Wynkoop had been the one to pay the penalty of his attack upon the boy.

Willis Wynkoop and Hal Halpine, whom our first chapter has made known to the reader, had ridden on and disappeared in the distance; then the youth turned to Buffalo Bill, thanked him for coming up just at the moment of greatest need, and feelingly assured the fort scout that he would not forget that again he had saved his life.

"Each time that mad Wynkoop boy would have slain you, that is true; and I warn you, Ned, to keep an eye upon him, should he ever cross your path again," said Buffalo Bill.

"I do not believe he will again try it."

"Don't trust him. He is as revengeful as an Indian and as merciless as a snake, so watch him!" was the scout's earnest warning.

Accepting the youth's invitation to return with him to the new settlement of Valley Farms, the two rode along over the plains, talking of the ambush into which Ned Duncan had ridden, and how it happened that the scout had arrived upon the scene.

"That can now be explained," answered Buffalo Bill.

"I was out on a scout, and stopped in at the Wynkoop settlement to warn them that the redskins were in an ugly mood. It was then that the major's pretty daughter informed me that her brother Willis had organized a band of the youths of the settlement, who had named themselves the Boy Regulators, and that Willis was making a number of suspicious journeys alone, or with but one comrade, in this direction."

"Knowing her brother, as she thoroughly does, she believed him to be plotting, for the secret came out that the two settlements were near each other, comparatively, and thus bring on a collision."

"That was enough. I at once took his trail, saw that he had a comrade with him, and was on the field soon after they were, so went into hiding to see what they were after."

"Yes; and so saved me."

"I confess that I was surprised to see

young Halpine with him, for I liked him the little I had seen of him."

"Yes; and in Kansas I always heard Hal Halpine spoken well of; but, then, he was only to aid in killing a Duncan, you know, and anything is fair in love and war," was the somewhat bitter reply.

But Buffalo Bill did not appear to hear him. He had halted, and was looking earnestly at the ground, there cut up by a heavy trail.

Presently he said:

"That ridge yonder hid us, or these red scavengers would have seen us, while we could not have discovered them in this timber where they were."

"It is a fresh trail, sure enough," said Ned.

"Yes, and made by half a hundred of the red imps, at least.

"There is one American horse's tracks, iron-shod, among those of the Indian ponies, and they passed here not over half an hour ago."

"Where can they be going?"

"Only one way in this direction."

"Where is that, Mr. Cody?"

"To scout about the Wynkoop settlement. But, see here!" quickly ejaculated the scout.

"Yes, sir."

"This trail cuts off miles, and if they reach the Red Pass before young Wynkoop and his pard they are doomed."

"Oh! can we not save them?" cried Ned Duncan.

The scout was silent for a moment, the youth watching him attentively.

Presently Cody answered:

"The boys went to the right of the Volcano Mountains, while these Indians are on a direct trail to Red Pass, and will get there first.

"There is a narrow cut through the Volcano Range which we can make for, and by hard riding it will bring us out at the Red Pass before either the two boys or the Indians get there."

"Let us save them, then."

"We can but try, young pard!" was Buffalo Bill's characteristic answer, and after another close observation of the trail the Government scout turned his horse, and with Ned Duncan by his side started on the hard ride to the rescue of Ned's most malignant enemy.

CHAPTER III.

THE RIDE TO THE RESCUE.

Buffalo Bill knew the wild country he was in as no other did.

He had scouted there for years, trailed hostile Indians and renegade rovers, and knew just where he could cut off miles of riding on the way to get to Red Pass before either the Indians or the two youths could do so.

"We'll have to put our horses hard to it, young pard, for if the redskins get there first they will not go through without reconnoitering, so will discover those two boys and lay for them.

"If we get there first, with the aid of the two boys we can keep them out of the pass, and their force is too small to allow them to remain and fight it out, unless there are other bands within call."

"And if there are, Mr. Cody?" asked Ned Duncan.

"You will have to ride to your settlement with all haste and have them ready for an attack, then push on to Fort Fetterman and have the commandant send troops directly here, where I will remain and keep my eyes upon the Indians."

"I am under your orders, sir."

"The other two must put away with all speed for the Wynkoop settlement and give the alarm; so that, after all, what

was intended as a bad piece of work—this attempt to murder you—may save the settlements from being surprised, and get the redskins a severe whipping."

"I hope so, sir," and Ned Duncan pressed on hard after the scout, who was keeping up a very lively pace.

From his discovery of the two trains of emigrants coming into that country, through coming upon Ned Duncan and Willis Wynkoop, who had accidentally met and were to fight a duel, in which the latter was showing himself most treacherous, Buffalo Bill had been deeply interested in the two bands from near his old home in Kansas.

When a mere youth himself he had heard of the Wynkoop-Duncan vendetta, and he was surprised to find each party, at the same time and the movements of one unknown to the other, seeking homes in the Wild West.

It was through Buffalo Bill that they had been promptly turned aside from the trail they were following, and so were prevented from meeting, thus avoiding a deadly conflict.

Denouncing Scott Jerome, the guide of the Wynkoop party, he had saved the wagon train from being led into an ambush, and later on had brought to their aid a force of soldiers from the fort, who had whipped off the redskins led by the guide Jerome after his flight from the emigrant train, they had met Major Wynkoop and his people, who were in great danger of being overwhelmed.

The scout had also visited Valley Farms once, the settlement of the Duncans, and he was glad to know that the secret had been kept so well that neither party knew of the existence of their foes so near them save the two youths, the young girl Hilda Wynkoop, and later Hal Halpine in possession of the fact, as had been seen.

Now, led by Buffalo Bill, Ned Duncan was riding to the rescue of the very two youths, who, but for the coming of the scout, would have murdered him.

"I hope that, as you saved Miss Hilua Wynkoop from the mountain lion, and now save those two foolish young fellows, Willis Wynkoop and Hal Halpine, if the secret does become known that your respective people are settled within a hundred miles of each other, it will do much to bury the hatchet and end this feud," said Buffalo Bill, as the trail permitted Ned Duncan to ride by his side.

"I hope it may, only you will be the one to save them now."

"No; you are with me, and that fool Willis Wynkoop must be made to feel it, and drop his determination to kill you."

"He never will, I am sure."

"Then, if there is any killing done, you must do it, for you will have to deal with him as a snake."

"I have not forgotten that he tried to kill me when I was going with him to his camp, when my horse slipped down the divide with me, and that you saved me, Ned, from having suspected treachery of him, and followed."

"I knew him."

"Well, if he does not behave himself now, I'll tell his father how he tried to shoot you by treachery in your intended duel with him, how he acted toward me, and also of his trick to murder you today with Halpine's aid."

"I tell you, that boy must be squelched, or nothing on earth can prevent the feud from breaking out again between your people and the Wynkoops."

"I feel that, but Willis Wynkoop will never be influenced for good, and he is determined to kill me, I am sure."

"Should he do so, I leave it to you, Mr.

Cody, to tell the whole story of his guilt, and thus try to end the feud through the sense of justice of the Wynkoops."

"I will do so, if you go under; but that shall not be if I can help it."

"Do you see that range of red cliffs ahead?"

"Yes, sir."

"The Red Pass is there, named because the cliffs are red, and also because there have been several terrible massacres there."

"I hope we are in time to save the boys, for I do not wish to see Willis Wynkoop killed from ambush."

"Another ten minutes will tell," replied Buffalo Bill, urging his horse on still more rapidly.

CHAPTER IV.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

"Great Scott, Hal, look yonder!"

The words broke from the lips of Willis Wynkoop as he and Hal Halpine were riding side by side toward the break in a lofty range of, scarlet cliffs known as the Red Pass.

They were less than a mile from the pass, and saw dash out of a heavy belt of timber running along at the foot of the cliffs two horsemen, riding at full speed for the opening in the range, and from which they were less than a third of a mile off.

"It is Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, Hal, and that cur Ned Duncan is on the other side of him, trying to hide himself."

"I see him now; but they are riding at full speed."

"To head us off at the pass through which we have to go."

"But for what purpose, Willis?"

"I suppose Ned Duncan is afraid I will kill him some day, and he has gotten the scout to hold us up and have it out now."

"I don't think that; but how did they get ahead of us?"

"Oh, that devilish scout knows the country as the Indians do, and just knew the trail to take to cut us off."

"They intended to assassinate us, but did not reach the pass in time to hide, so we are on even terms with them."

"Willis Wynkoop, you are a fool."

"Thanks; but explain the compliment you pay me, please," sneered Willis Wynkoop.

"In the first place, if you had your whole band of Boy Regulators along, and Buffalo Bill was alone, we would not be on even terms, for he'd down us, sure."

"I see who the fool is."

"I have not finished yet."

"Go ahead, for I wish to get ready to meet those assassins."

"There you are repeating the same epithet."

"But, let me tell you that you know Ned Duncan is above such an act, and Buffalo Bill's record is too noble a one for you to accuse him of such a crime."

"You think so?"

"I know it, and more, because we were guilty, and with shame I admit it, of having attempted to assassinate Ned Duncan. We have no right to suspect others of our crimes."

"Why are they going at full speed for that pass, then?"

"I do not know; but we will soon know."

"When we find them trapping us."

"I'll take all risks and go ahead."

"They can have no other motive but to kill us."

"Wait and see."

"When too late."

"See, they are waving to us; or, at least, the scout is."

"You can answer, for I won't."

Hal Halpine answered the waving of the scout's sombrero by taking his hat from his head and doing likewise.

The scout and Ned Duncan were now at the pass, and there the latter halted, while the former disappeared by riding into the opening in the range.

"That coward cur has stopped to wait for us," growled Willis Wynkoop.

"He does not show much of the coward by waiting to meet two whom he has had every proof are his worst foes."

"Say, Halpine, you ought to go over to the Duncan clan, you admire that cub so."

"Willis Wynkoop, don't turn me against you by insults, for you well know that the Wynkoop-Duncan feud was begun by your family, and that the first to aid you were those of my name."

"You know, too, that the Halpines have suffered more by death losses than any other of the clan; but I can be just, even to a foe, though I was a fool to be led away by you in what we tried to do to-day."

"No, you do not wish to turn my friendship from you, Wynkoop."

Hal Halpine spoke with a depth of sincerity that could not but impress his desperate young comrade, for the latter quickly held out his hand and said:

"I am a fool, Hal, for I should not have said what I did to you, for the Halpines have been the one to suffer the most, I admit, in this vendetta."

"But I hate every drop of Duncan blood, and I cannot tolerate seeing one of the gang, unless it is to kill them, or to hear a word in their praise."

"To me they are all a bad lot, worthy only of the gallows."

"Don't say that, Willis, for you know that had your brother Ralph killed Ned Duncan the feeling in Kansas was such that he would have been hanged for it."

"The law-abiding people there were tiring of the vendetta, and when there was a meeting held of those not interested in either clan, the fault was placed more upon the Wynkoops than upon the Duncans."

"Don't talk to me of such stuff."

"We cowardly came away from Kansas, leaving the field to our foes, as we supposed, and here have the Duncans come, too."

"Well, we must make the best of a bad situation."

"That fellow is awaiting us, and the scout is doubtless in hiding to protect him."

"If there is any talking, you do it, for my gun shall alone speak for me."

"And somebody else's gun may speak to you if you don't be more careful," and with the words the two rode up to within fifty feet of where Ned Duncan stood by the side of his panting horse, calmly awaiting their approach, but with no show of hostility toward them, or dread of them.

CHAPTER V. THE WARNING.

Ned Duncan had his eye upon the two youths as they rode toward him, but he showed no sign of expecting hostility from them, nor of making any attempt to face them with other than peaceable intentions.

The scout had disappeared on through the pass, which at that point was very narrow, and further on had an abrupt turn in it.

Around this turn had Buffalo Bill gone.

"Well, Duncan, how came you to head us off?" called out Hal Halpine, as Ned Duncan remained silent.

"Soon after you left us, Mr. Cody saw a fresh Indian trail, and, discovering the direction it took, he knew that they were coming to this pass."

"Ah! and where are they?"

"Nowhere—it's all a big bluff," said Willis Wynkoop in a hateful way.

Paying no attention to the last remark, Ned Duncan continued in his quiet way:

"The trail they are on will lead them here, and Mr. Cody has gone through the pass to see if they are in sight."

"He'll not find them, for Indians are scarce in this country, and if there are many of them, he would not wish to head them off."

"It's some game against us, Hal."

Hal Halpine turned toward Willis Wynkoop and said indignantly:

"For shame, Willis!"

"Mr. Cody knew," resumed Ned Duncan, wholly unmoved by the insulting words of his foe, "that the Indians would reach this pass before you did, unless you rode very fast, and discovering your coming would ambush you, to either fire upon you or capture you."

"For this reason we come to put you on your guard."

"And I appreciate it, Ned Duncan, so here is my hand upon it," and Hal Halpine held out his hand, which Ned Duncan, after a slight hesitation, grasped.

At this Willis Wynkoop laughed in a derisive way, and said:

"You are a fool, Hal Halpine, to surrender to the enemy, and believe all this bosh, which is merely to curry favor with us for some reason."

Ned Duncan fixed his eyes upon the youth in a way that made his face flush, yet he did not speak, and just then the clatter of hoofs was heard, and Buffalo Bill dashed around the bend.

"Come! We have got to meet them at the other end of the pass."

"They are still a mile away," he cried.

The three youths rode forward to join the scout, Ned Duncan in advance, and the other two talking earnestly together in a low tone.

Having called the youths, Buffalo Bill turned and rode back through the pass.

After a ride of half a mile the scout halted where there was another bend, and just there the pass widened and a spring of cool water was on one side and a grass plot.

"Stake your horses there, lads, but do not take off their saddles or bridles, for we may have to get out of this in a hurry," said Buffalo Bill, who had not even looked at Willis Wynkoop and Hal Halpine.

The boys did as told, and then the scout called to them to come and join him.

"You, Halpine, go with Duncan, and I will take you with me, Wynkoop."

"Why divide so?" said Wynkoop angrily.

"Because I want you under my eye."

"I will go with my own pard."

"Look out, Hal! There is some trick in this to down us!" cried Willis Wynkoop.

With a leap like a panther, Buffalo Bill was in front of the youth, his iron grip was upon his throat, and the words rang with a terrible earnestness as he said:

"You do as I tell you, or I'll bind and gag you, boy! I'll stand no more nonsense from you."

Willis Wynkoop felt that iron grip upon him, saw the fire in the scout's eye, and was cowed.

Turning to Halpine, the scout said:

"There are half a hundred Indians not half a mile away from here, entering this pass, and my glass showed me at their

head either that the grave has given up its dead, or your traitor guide, Scott Jerome, was not the white man we saw dead on the field that day of the redskins' attack, but some one else."

"We can check these redskins here, for on each side of this pass you see good positions for us to fight from, and all of us have repeating rifles."

"Had we not come here to save you, then you would have ridden into a trap."

"Now to your posts, and let me say, Halpine, that I have confidence in you, while I'll see to it that this young fellow obeys me, and does not get a chance to shoot me in the back."

All saw that the scout was thoroughly aroused now, and the four were soon in position, protected by rocks that commanded the pass beyond the bend.

"Take that position, sir," and Buffalo Bill addressed Willis Wynkoop, while he pointed to a rock below him half a dozen feet, and as far in advance.

Across the pass a hundred feet were Ned Duncan and Halpine, also in good positions, and looking up the narrow ravine they could all four see out of the pass upon the plain beyond.

And there, just coming into view, were the Indians, half a hundred in number, and with a chief mounted upon a large gray horse riding at their head.

CHAPTER VI.

AT BAY IN THE PASS.

"That chief on the gray horse is the renegade, Scott Jerome."

"Look at him through my glass," and Buffalo Bill handed his field-glass to Willis Wynkoop, while he called out across the pass:

"Remember, do not fire until I give the word, and do not kill or wound the chief on the gray horse."

"Ay, ay, sir," called out Ned Duncan.

"Be particular about this, for that renegade must live to be taken alive some day."

"We understand," said Hal Halpine.

"Well, do you recognize him?" the scout asked Willis Wynkoop.

"It is a white man—yes."

"It is your old friend, Scott Jerome, for see his size, beard, and hair."

"I thought the guide was killed?"

"So did I, for there was a dead white man on the field that day, only he had been shot in the face, and the cavalry had charged over him so that he was disfigured beyond recognition."

"These redskins are out as an advance party, and they are intending to make a raid upon your settlement, or they would not be down this far."

"We will fire on them, beat them back, then mount your horses, you and your friend, and ride back through the pass, then bear to the left along the range, and after twenty miles you will come to where there is a canyon leading through."

"I know it."

"Go through the range then and keep your horses at it for your settlement and give the alarm."

"I understand."

"I shall send Ned Duncan to warn his people, and to the fort for soldiers, while I watch the Indians and try to keep them here as long as I can."

"I will do as you say, though it goes against me, I frankly admit, to obey orders from you."

"No doubt," dryly answered Buffalo Bill.

"But let me tell you that you had better let my pard Halpine warn our people and send me on to the fort for troops, for

I know the trail, as that fellow Duncan will not get there."

"I am of the same opinion, if I was fool enough to do as you ask, for you would ambush and kill him before he got a mile."

Willis Wynkoop bit his lips, but replied:

"There you go; give a dog a bad name, and so it is; but I had no such thought."

"Then my eyes lie to me in reading your face; and, let me tell you now, they have been mighty true to me in the past, always knowing one of your kind at first sight."

"No; you go to your settlement with your friend, and I'll take care of the rest."

"Now be ready, and don't kill your friend to save him from the gallows, for if the redskins capture you some day he may be useful in saving you from torture and death."

Buffalo Bill's eyes were upon the face of the boy as he spoke, and he noted the change in it.

What he saw convinced him that he had intended to kill the traitor guide, thus preventing the scout from carrying out his intentions some day of hanging him; but the suggestion that if he, Willis Wynkoop, was captured some day he might find the renegade in the Indian camp of service to him, at once checked his former intention.

Buffalo Bill realized that if the renegade chief fell, Willis Wynkoop would not be the one to kill him.

With his glass at his eye, Buffalo Bill had turned it full upon the chief, and each moment convinced him that he had made no mistake, that it was none other than Scott Jerome, the traitor guide, whom he had believed dead.

The Indians were coming along at a slow pace, the chief well in advance of his braves.

They were not riding in their usual style of single file, but by threes and fours, and their whole appearance indicated their belief that no danger was near.

By entering the pass there as they did, the scout read that their plans were to get into the basin or valley beyond, and there go into hiding until the other bands gathered there for their intended attacks upon the two settlements.

In that basin, or valley, they would find the finest grass and water for their horses, and could rest for a couple of days, while the fact that if their trails were seen, being divided into a number of small bands they would be looked upon as a small hunting party.

"Now be ready."

"My shot will be the signal, and you aim at those four some ranks back, for Ned and your friend will doubtless fire at those in front."

"Ned? You are getting awful thick with Duncan, ain't you?" inquired Willis Wynkoop.

"Yes, having been thrown together so much in thwarting your deviltry, we have become firm pals for life," and as Buffalo Bill uttered the last word his rifle went up to his shoulder; the muzzle peered through the pine bushes on the rocks, and then came the sharp ring as his hand touched trigger.

A warrior back in the column dropped dead from his saddle, but as he fell the other rifles flashed out their first shots.

They were all well aimed, and fortunately not a shot was thrown away, no two drawing trigger on the same brave.

The Indians were startled terribly and completely surprised, but the four repeating rifles then began to rattle, and

the leaden hail fell into their midst rapidly, dropping ponies and riders, and wounding others.

A minute after the firing of Buffalo Bill's first shot, the red horsemen were surging back upon each other, and then, in sudden panic, stampeded, their white chief in vain trying to rally them to charge on around the bend and sweep the pass of their foes, for the scout heard him tell them in their own tongue that there were not more than a dozen pale-faces there, and doubtless those were only a hunting party from one of the settlements.

But the Indians quickly fled out of range, for, all told, they had not half a score of rifles, and the rattle of the repeaters made them believe they were outnumbered largely.

CHAPTER VII. A TOUGH CUSTOMER.

It was Ned Duncan's first real Indian battle, though he had been in skirmishes in Kansas on several occasions when pursuing redskin raiders.

He saw that the scout had known what he was about, though facing half a hundred braves with four whites.

Then, within easy range, lay half a dozen dead red-skins, as many dead and wounded ponies, and several braves were on foot retreating down the pass, evidently wounded or hurt by the fall of their ponies, while the white chief and the rest were racing out of range.

"Well, that went great," cried Hal Halpine enthusiastically.

"It did indeed, but the scout is calling," was Ned Duncan's reply.

"We have given them a check and it will be some time before they decide what to do, so you and your pard start for the settlement now," said Buffalo Bill.

"And you?" impertinently asked the youth.

"I'll attend to my own actions, sir; but do you go to your father and tell him what has occurred, only remember if you dare to mention the presence of Ned Duncan here I will drive you out of this country," and Buffalo Bill then called to Hal Halpine to come over and join him, but for Ned Duncan to remain where he was and keep his eye down the pass on the Indians.

Then he resumed, addressing the youth, whom he now began to hate most cordially:

"Tell your father I will have a force from the fort after these redskins very soon, but to be ready with his men to lend a hand if he is needed, and he may be, as I have an idea that there are a large number of warriors now on the march here."

"Do you understand?"

"I do."

"Then mount your horse and be off, for here is your pard," and just then Hal Halpine joined them.

Addressing the latter, Buffalo Bill said:

"See here, Halpine, if you have any regard for this ugly-hearted friend of yours, keep him out of mischief, for if he attempts to harm Ned Duncan by treachery, I shall see to it that his minutes are quickly numbered."

"I'll vouch for him, Mr. Cody, never fear."

"But, I wish to thank you for saving my life, as you certainly did do, and tell you frankly how ashamed I am of my treatment of Ned Duncan."

"You'll never catch me in any underhand work again, sir."

"I believe you, for you are a manly fellow, Halpine."

"But now be off for your settlement, and I'll report to you what I told Wynkoop, as I do not trust him a little bit," and the scout told Hal Halpine just what he had said to Willis Wynkoop, and added:

"Also say to Major Wynkoop that his traitor guide, Jerome, was not killed, as we supposed, but is leading these redskins, with many more, I am sure, to come."

"Say that his object can only be to attack his settlement, and be sure not to mention the fact of the Duncan settlement, or that there was another with me than you two."

"I understand, sir."

"And you must ride hard, for you are well mounted, and your horses are fresh."

"We will, sir."

"I hope there will be no halting in the pass to await Ned Duncan's coming along for Wynkoop to get a shot at him from an ambush."

"No, no, Mr. Cody, he goes with me, and I assure you, I would not be guilty of—"

"I do not fear you, but Wynkoop, for he is as venomous as a snake," and the scout's eye was flashing as he turned it upon the youth he accused and was sure he read aright.

"Some day it will be for me to get revenge on you, Buffalo Bill," hissed Willis Wynkoop.

"No threats, sir, but be off!"

Hal Halpine sprung for his horse, took up the stake, and was in his saddle with a bound.

Willis Wynkoop was very leisurely in his actions, and only mounted after a delay of several minutes.

He seemed anxious to provoke the scout.

As he was delaying so long, Buffalo Bill called out sharply:

"If you delay an instant longer I shall keep you here with me and send you to the fort!"

This hastened the evil-natured boy, and calling out to Hal Halpine the scout continued:

"If he delays you, Halpine, leave him; but I'll know if he does not arrive with you, and send a file of soldiers after him, for patience is ceasing to be a virtue with me."

Willis Wynkoop was thoroughly alarmed now and called out:

"I'm doing the best I can, and I certainly am anxious to warn my people of danger."

"I do not know whether you are or not, as you appear to be so friendly with that renegade, Jerome, you may be of his way of thinking—at least, I shall make that charge against you to the colonel."

But Willis Wynkoop hardly heard the last words as he went off at a gallop, Hal Halpine after him.

Watching them for a minute Buffalo Bill called out:

"Say, Ned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Keep your eye on the reds, and if they attempt to come, empty your rifle into their midst, only don't hit the renegade, and then come down and mount your horse, leading mine."

"I am going for a walk up the pass, as I wish to make a discovery."

"All right, sir," called out Ned Duncan cheerily.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YOUNG AVENGER'S THREAT.

"Come on, Willis, what are you stopping for here?"

Hal Halpine asked the question when

the two had gotten half a mile from the bend where they had left Buffalo Bill and his boy pard, Ned.

It was at another bend in the pass, and the cliffs towered very high over them, while there were boulders scattered all about.

"This is the very place, Hal," said Willis Wynkoop.

"For what?"

"For what I intend to do."

"What is that?"

"I intend to halt here, so dismount and we'll go into hiding."

"See here, Willis, do you know that we have started upon a long trail to warn our people of danger?"

"That's all right."

"It is not all right, for delay may ruin all."

"Bah! there are only a few Indians about, and four of us whipped them, so I've lost my scare of redskins."

"I have not, and had it not been for the scout we would have gone under, and he whipped the Indians back by knowing just how to do it."

"I don't say so."

"But come, let us get ready for them."

"For whom?"

"Well, first, we'll pick off Ned Duncan, for you see we are around the bend here, and he will ride right upon us, and if he is alone I'll take him; but if the scout is with him, I'll send a bullet into his heart and you can draw bead on Ned."

Hal Halpine looked at the youth before him in blank amazement.

He did not speak for surprise, and only when Willis Wynkoop laughed rudely and asked:

"Are you going join me?"

"Never!"

"Do you think I would be guilty of such a dastardly act as that you suggest?"

"Wherein is it dastardly?"

"Do we not owe our lives to the scout, and what has Ned Duncan done, though our foe, but came to our aid when he knew we were in danger."

"Both he and the scout risked their lives for us."

"They had some other motive."

"I do not believe it."

"Well, I have vowed to kill that Duncan cub and I shall wait here and give him a shot, for he is going to warn his people, or, that is, the scout said he was."

"And you intend to again play the assassin?"

"I intend to avenge my poor brother Ralph, whose life Ned Duncan wiped out."

"Willis Wynkoop, I am ashamed of you."

"Because I am doing what I deem my duty?"

"Because you are going to do the most cowardly act of your life, that is, if I allow you to do so."

"You allow me to do so?"

"That is what I said."

"Now, what have you got to do with it?"

"Much, for I will prevent it."

"How can you?"

"I will simply ride back and inform the scout of your intention."

"You will, eh?"

"Yes."

"Either I will do that or I will remain here and put Ned Duncan on his guard."

"Hal Halpine, we have always been the best of friends, but if you attempt to turn against me now I shall kill you."

"It is a game that two can play at, when it comes to that, Willis Wynkoop."

"And one be successful in."

"It is true that you are stronger than I, a better shot, and, as all believe, the best man, young as you are, in our settlement; but I do not fear you at any time, and especially when you are willing to play the part of a coward."

"For shame, Willis, to act as you have."

"Be a man and let your better heart rule you, not the devil that now seems to govern you."

Hal Halpine spoke earnestly, and in a manly way.

He sat upon his horse, while Willis Wynkoop had dismounted, and the two were not ten feet apart.

Thus far neither had made any move toward drawing a weapon.

Willis Wynkoop stood by the head of his horse, and had moved around, as though by accident, until he had gotten the animal between himself and Hal Halpine.

He held a good position in case of trouble between them, for his horse was a protection to him.

They were just around the bend of the pass, and not fifteen feet from where they could look up the way they had come and see the approach of a person for several hundred yards.

As though to win his case without trouble Willis Wynkoop said:

"See here, Hal, that scout is nothing to us, and we both cordially hate Ned Duncan, and you know he is on the death list of the Wynkoops."

"Come, let us wipe both out and then tell our people the Duncans are here near us, have tracked us here to keep up the vendetta."

"What do you say?"

"I say that it is an infamous lie, and a proposition that is unworthy of any one but a coward."

"I am not of your kind, thank Heaven, Willis Wynkoop."

"Come, I'll have no more of this, for I go back to put the scout and Ned Duncan on their guard against an assassin."

"Hold!"

"I don't wish to kill you, but I shall mark you for life for those words, Hal Halpine."

"Look out for your left ear!" and the rifle of Willis Wynkoop was suddenly thrust over his saddle and pointed directly toward the head of Hal, who was caught completely off his guard.

CHAPTER IX.

BRANDED FOR LIFE.

Hal Halpine was no coward, and he did not show fright at the bare threat of Willis Wynkoop to put a life-mark upon him.

From earliest boyhood he had been under the influence of Willis Wynkoop, and had followed the latter's lead blindly, greatly to his own detriment.

At times he had rebelled, but Willis Wynkoop had forced him back into line again.

Thus had he been led into going with him to attack Ned Duncan as he had done.

Now he was again a rebel against his young master's will.

But a more powerful influence was upon him to break the chain of evil.

It was the will of Buffalo Bill.

It was the incentive to exert his manhood, not to be led, as in the past.

But he had not anticipated such cunning on the part of Willis Wynkoop to get the advantage while he was talking to him.

But the latter had quietly done so, and had him at his mercy.

And more, he coolly threatened to brand him by sending a bullet through his left ear.

Hal Halpine dared not move.

He knew that the young dead-shot could do what he threatened: but half an inch out of line and the bullet might cut through his head.

If he attempted to draw a weapon Willis Wynkoop might fire quickly and with bad aim.

So, like a statue sat Hal Halpine upon his horse, facing a dread ordeal of being killed or marked for life.

Wickedly did Willis Wynkoop glare into his face, and he said in his sneering way:

"Yes, Hal, you must be put down a peg or two."

"You are getting too cheeky of late I have noticed."

"I will simply cut a hole in that left ear of yours, and it will teach you not to attempt to thwart me."

"You can tell the people an Indian bullet cut the hole, see: but you will remember that I marked you as a warning that I must not be disobeyed."

"Now, hold your head steady, for I do not wish to miss you—nor do I desire to kill you."

"Say when you are ready, Hal!"

"I am ready now!"

The deep voice fell upon the ears of the two boys with startling effect.

To one it was the signal of help.

To the other it came like a death-knell.

Hal Halpine simply raised his eyes and beheld standing just at the bend in the cliff fifteen feet away the tall form of Buffalo Bill.

The scout had his revolver leveled, and it covered Willis Wynkoop.

The latter had his back to the scout, and was not eight feet from him.

His rifle was across his saddle and pointed toward Hal Halpine.

His revolvers were in his belt.

He had been taken in the rear and was wholly at the mercy of the scout.

At the words that fell like a knell upon him, Willis Wynkoop had glanced over his shoulder.

He saw the scout now, and his sneer left his face, he became as pallid as a corpse and his lips trembled.

He seemed to realize that the scout would not be merciful this time.

"I am ready now, I said, young man, and I wish you to know that I suspected you of treachery, so was on your trail the moment you left."

"I know this pass well, and by cutting through among the boulders I was here almost as soon as you were, so I have heard all."

"I don't like playing the eavesdropper, but I wish to know just what you are."

"It was shown me that this young man is a noble fellow, only he has been under a very evil influence, your own."

"You have delayed here while the lives of all in your settlement are at stake, and I shall not allow you to escape without a lesson this time."

"Do you understand?"

The scout had spoken in a low, clear tone, and both youths heard all that he had to say.

As Willis Wynkoop made no reply, Buffalo Bill continued:

"You understand well, and I wish to tell you again that I intend to give you a reminder of having met me, and that I shall be upon your track often."

"I could take you to the fort, report just what you have done, and the colonel would make short work of you."

"But for your father's sake, and your

mother and sister's sake, I will not do that.

"I shall only brand you, as you intended to mark your friend for life, because you could not make an assassin out of him.

"You shall wear my mark, sir.

"Stand steady, for it will be a narrow margin between wearing a hole in your ear and being killed.

"You can tell your people you got it in the Indian fight, you know, just as you advised your pard to do.

"Steady, now—"

The revolver cracked, there was a wild yell from the lips of Willis Wynkoop, and dropping his rifle he grasped his ear, from which the blood was streaming.

"You have torn my ear off!

"I shall have your life for this!" he yelled in a rage.

CHAPTER X.

HAL HALPINE'S RESOLVE.

Stepping up to the wounded youth, Buffalo Bill, unheeding his threat, simply took his hands from his ear and said:

"Your ear is not torn off, sir.

"I do not bungle my work, as you will discover.

"See, Halpine, is this not a clean-cut hole right through the upper part of the ear?"

"It is, sir.

"It was a remarkable shot."

"It was a damnable act, and one I'll remember," growled Willis Wynkoop.

"It was what you intended to do for your friend, and we are not friends, you know.

"Your work might have killed him.

"But I wish you to remember it, and it will remind you that I will stand no more trifling with you.

"Let me dress it for you."

"Never! I would die first."

"It is not dangerous, and just as you please as to having me dress the wound.

"Now, do you promise to go on with this young man, or shall I take you to the fort with me?"

"I will go to my home."

"Then do so, and no time is to be lost.

"Come, be off, for I tell you frankly I am in no humor to stand any nonsense with you."

This fact was patent, especially to Willis Wynkoop, and still holding his handkerchief to his ear he mounted his horse and dashed away.

"Watch him as you would a snake, Pard Hal, and if he gets too bad for you, come after me and I'll tame him, or he'll do mischief, for he is a bad one clear through.

"Good-by, and don't spare your horses."

With this the scout turned back up the pass, as though he gave Willis Wynkoop no further thought, while Hal Halpine dashed on after his companion.

Willis Wynkoop rode rapidly, and never drew rein for several miles, then halting at a mountain brook.

Hal was close behind him, and dismounted as his comrade did.

Bathing the wounded ear, Willis Wynkoop called out:

"Say, Hal, is my ear torn off?"

"No."

"It feels so."

"There is a clean-cut hole through it, that is all.

"It has stopped bleeding, and will be all right."

"Only the brand of Buffalo Bill will be there, for it will never close up."

"No, there will be a hole there."

"And Buffalo Bill made it."

"Yes."

"Do you think I am one to forgive?"

"I know that you are not.

"You simply got a little of your own medicine, Willis Wynkoop.

"The tables were turned upon you, for I would have fared worse at your hand."

Willis Wynkoop regarded his companion closely.

He seemed to read him through and through.

What he read was that he was no longer under his mastery.

The charm was broken, and Hal Halpine was no longer under his influence.

Whatever the motive that prompted Willis Wynkoop to do so, he suddenly held forth his hand and said in a frank way, and with something of his old-time manner:

"Yes, Hal, I got some of my own medicine, and I deserved it.

"I wish you to forgive and forget, and we'll quarrel no more.

"This is a bullet wound through my ear, gotten at the pass where we fought the Indians, you know."

"I understand, Willis.

"I am no tell-tale."

"I know that.

"But now dress the wound for me, and then we'll push on rapidly and give the warning to our people, though really I do not believe there is any danger."

"Buffalo Bill is not one to make a report that is false, Willis."

"I see that you are dead gone on the fellow, Hal, so I'll say no more; but I intend to turn scout myself, and you'll find that we boys can render good service."

"You must admit that Mr. Cody was right about the guide, Jerome, and in the other attack from Indians, while he saved us from getting killed or captured at the pass."

"Oh, yes, I give him credit where he deserves it; but I don't like him, and I wish him to understand that the Boy Regulators of Wynkoop Valley can take care of the settlement without help from him.

"But we must ride at a good jump now."

Hal Halpine was only too anxious to do the latter, and they kept the pace up at a rapid canter.

Night came on, but Willis Wynkoop knew the trails strangely well, and the pace was not slackened, save for a halt before sundown for a short rest and supper.

Again they renewed their way, and Willis Wynkoop became very talkative.

His manner convinced Hal Halpine that he had really repented or had made up his mind to play some deep game.

He was not one to repent suddenly of his evil deeds, and Hal Halpine was assured that he did not intend to lose his prestige with the boys and settlers; but was sure he was playing a part for some deep purpose known only to himself, or really sorry for what he had done.

"The scout said beware of him, and I'll watch him," he said, and it was a wise resolve, as will be seen.

CHAPTER XI.

A PRISONER.

When Buffalo Bill saw the two youths ride away he continued on at a rapid walk through the pass.

He did not appear to dread any further trouble from the ugly nature of Willis Wynkoop, at least not then.

He found Ned Duncan on duty, and seeing the scout coming the youth called out:

"They are moving up again, but in smaller force, and slowly."

"Yes, they have an idea that we were but few and ran off after that first fire.

"We will fool them, Pard Ned."

Ned Duncan was more than willing to be governed in everything by the scout, so he simply prepared for action.

"We will not fire until they are very close.

"Then make every shot tell on a brave, not a pony, for dismounted they may dash for the bend here and reach it.

"As soon as we have checked them we will run to our horses, mount and ride for it.

"I shall get the animals ready."

This the scout did, and then took up position for a fight.

He saw only a score of the braves in sight, and these were straggling along, their eyes fixed upon the rocks from whence the fatal fire had come before.

They reached the spot where lay their dead comrades and the ponies that had fallen, halted a moment, and one young brave, in obedience to an order from the renegade chief, advanced alone and on foot.

He walked boldly and with the air of one who was glad to show his courage and defiance of danger.

He passed all the dead braves, got within a short distance of the rocks and turned and looked back.

Buffalo Bill saw his intention and quickly slipped down to a spot near which he must pass.

The scout had his lariat in his hand.

Nearer came the brave; the others rested upon their ponies all of four hundred yards distant.

He reached the first of the boulders, pressed cautiously ahead, turned and waved his hand at the others and then stepped around the bend out of sight.

As he did so there came a swish, a noose settled over his head and he was dragged backward and fell heavily.

Ere he could utter a cry the hand of the scout was upon his throat, a gag was thrust into his mouth and tied there and his hands were bound securely.

Then Buffalo Bill carried him to his horse, placed him behind his saddle and made him fast there.

"They are coming, sir!"

The warning came from Ned, for the Indians, seeing that their comrade had given no alarm, considered the way clear and rode forward once more.

"Wait until I fire, and then drop their ponies, for then they cannot pursue us.

"If they push ahead on foot pick them off," said the scout, and a cheery reply was returned.

The Indians came on, the renegade white chief in the lead.

"Don't hit the chief, Ned."

"No, sir."

"It is a shame to shoot the ponies, but it must be done."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll drop the chief's horse with my first shot."

"When will you fire?" whispered Ned.

"Not until they reach that pine."

It was allowing them to come very close, Ned Duncan thought, but he had perfect confidence in the scout, and made no comment.

Nearer and nearer came the Indians, until, halting, the chief gave a call.

It was a signal to the brave who had gone ahead.

It fell upon his ears, yet he could return no reply, give no warning.

Buffalo Bill did so for him, for he called back a response in the Indian tongue of only a shout and a word.

At once the chief rode forward, his warriors following.

They seemed to feel that the way was clear.

But just as the renegade leader reached the pine tree the scout had elected as the dead-line, there was a puff of smoke, a sharp report, and the large horse of the chief dropped in his tracks, his rider being thrown heavily.

Then the two rifles, the scout's and Ned Duncan's, rattled rapidly and down went Indian ponies and a brave or two.

Several of the warriors rushed bravely to their chief, whose leg was pinned beneath his horse, and rescued him, while all then made a dash back down the pass.

The chief was evidently a little hurt by his fall, for he was put upon a pony, the others running by the side of the animal.

Down the pass they fled until they felt that they were out of range of the deadly rifles, and little dreaming that their two daring foes were retreating also.

"I shall leave him bound and gagged here for them to find."

"They will not come soon again, and delay is what I want," said the scout.

So he took the Indian prisoner from his horse, bound him to a small tree, and then mounting he rode up the pass, Ned Duncan by his side.

"Now, Ned, push for your settlement and give the alarm, and then mount a fresh horse and ride hard for Fetterman, telling the colonel all that I have explained to you," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XII.

NED'S NIGHT RIDE.

Ned Duncan's horse was a good one, and comparatively fresh, so he went swiftly along on his way.

The youth followed the directions given him by Buffalo Bill to cut off distance wherever he could, and when night fell he had gone over thirty of the fifty miles he had to ride to the Valley Farms settlement.

He had come also to the part of the country which he knew pretty thoroughly, so the darkness did not check his speed and he kept his horse up to the same killing pace.

He knew, as he neared the valley that his horse was failing him, but still he urged him on, and two hours after night-fall the animal staggered up to the comfortable cabin home of Doctor Duncan.

"Ah, Ned, we were getting anxious about you, my son; but your horse is dead beat—anything wrong?" said Doctor Duncan, a fine-looking man of fifty, greeting Ned as he slipped from his saddle.

"Yes, father, I met Buffalo Bill, and the Indians are moving at Red Pass in large force."

"We had two fights with them there, and checked their advance, and I want Phantom to ride right on to Fort Fetterman for help."

"There were two others with us, and Mr. Cody sent them to warn another settlement, and he wishes you to get your whole force under arms, and have guards out to prevent surprise."

"Will you please have Phantom brought up for me, sir, while mother gives me some supper."

"Do you expect to go to Fort Fetterman to-night, my son?"

"Yes, sir, it is only sixty miles."

"But you do not know the trail, and—"

"I know forty miles of the trail, and Buffalo Bill directed me how to go from there."

"I must have the cavalry on the march for the Red Pass before dawn, sir, and

the distance there from the fort is nearly seventy miles, the scout says."

"Where is Buffalo Bill?"

"He remained to watch the Indians, and so be able to advise the officer in command of the troops upon his arrival as to their numbers and movements."

"Good!"

"I'll have Phantom brought for you at once, my son, and do you eat a good supper; but I wish you would take some one with you."

"Ah, no sir, for you may need every man here."

"All right, I'll give the signal and place the men at once on guard."

Mrs. Duncan gave Ned a good supper as soon as he had freshened himself up with a bath and change of clothing, and Phantom, a beautiful roan, was ready for him when he came out of the cabin to start upon his long, hard ride.

The alarm signal had been given, and the men of the settlement were all gathering at the Duncan cabin, where the doctor, who was also called "Captain," as the head of the settlers, was to tell them of the news brought by Ned and the precautions to be taken against a surprise.

All who had assembled gave a rousing cheer to Ned Duncan, as the brave boy dashed away upon his night ride for help, and the rapid clatter of Phantom's hoofs showed that the animal was going to be put to it hard to reach the fort in the shortest time possible.

It was plain riding for Ned as far as he knew the trails, but beyond that he had to go by directions he had received from the scout.

But he had listened attentively to all instructions, and Phantom kept up his long, swinging, untiring lope in the same way after he passed the furthest point known to his rider from actual observation.

The scout had directed him well, and in spite of the darkness the youth was only at a loss several times to find his way, and a halt of a few minutes of thought soon set him right again.

It was yet an hour before dawn when the lights of the fort loomed up before the brave boy, and it was hard for him to resist a wild yell at his triumph.

But he checked this boyish desire to give vent to his joy and dashed on until halted by the sentinel.

He was soon in charge of the corporal of the guard, and a few minutes after the officer of the day was listening to his story.

Deciding that as the news came from Buffalo Bill it was urgent, as the Chief of Scouts was known well to be no alarmist, the officer said:

"Come with me, my lad, and I will take you to Colonel Carrol."

Ned gave a glance at Phantom, who, with low-hung head, was panting like a hard-run hound, and said:

"He brought me, sir, in great time."

"Can he be cared for right away?"

"Yes, indeed."

"That is right, never neglect your horse, for it shows your heart is in the right place," and calling to a soldier he gave him orders to see that the horse had every attention.

Colonel Carrol, every inch a soldier, arose quickly at the call of his orderly, and in dressing gown and slippers received Ned Duncan.

"You were right to call me, Captain Maynard."

"Now, my brave boy, tell me your whole story."

Ned told the story as far as he deemed it necessary.

Of the Valley Farms settlement the colonel of course knew, so Ned simply said he belonged there, that he had met the scout, who had tracked the band of Indians to Red Pass, and found they were under the leadership of the renegade, Scott Jerome.

"We'll hang him some day, for Cody will not let him escape him," said the colonel, and he added:

"But they may break in upon the settlement a hundred miles to the westward, for the renegade guided those people to their new homes."

"Yes, sir, but we met two men from there, and Chief Cody sent them off to warn their people."

"That was right, and with the two settlements on their guard, and the troopers we can catch the Indians in a trap through your plucky ride here to warn me, my boy."

"Now, get what rest you can, and I'll have three hundred men in the saddle and a couple of light guns to pull out on the march within a couple of hours."

"You'll find a lounge in that next room, so throw yourself down upon it for a nap."

Ned was terribly tired, his mission had been accomplished, and in five minutes he was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAIL OF THE TROOPERS.

"Now, Major Brown, start at once, and do not spare men or horses; push for Red Pass, and Chief of Scouts Cody will head you off somewhere in that neighborhood, so that brave boy gave me to understand."

The words sounded far away as they came to Ned Duncan's ears.

He lay upon the lounge in a deep sleep, but the voice of the colonel partly aroused him.

He heard the reply of the officer to whom the colonel had spoken, Major Brown, then the clanking of sabers, the jingle of spurs, and he sprang to his feet and appeared in the door with a startled look, while he cried:

"Oh, sir, do not let them go without me!"

The colonel laughed at his earnestness and replied:

"I thought sleep would do you more good, after what I know you had passed through, but you can have breakfast with me and then follow and catch up, if you wish."

"Thank you, sir, and Mr. Cody told me I could leave my horse and take one of his, an animal he called Rainbow."

"Yes, I'll have your bridle and saddle put upon him."

"But come, my breakfast is ready, and I wish to talk to you."

The orderly was told to have Rainbow at the door within half an hour, and greatly refreshed by his two hours' nap, Ned enjoyed his breakfast greatly, and lost his awe of the commandant of a fort, whom he had regarded as being of a very high order of the human kind.

"Introduce yourself to Major Brown, and tell him I told you to give him all the information you could as to the Indians, and just where to find Buffalo Bill."

"The major is a hard rider, and he will reach the basin by midnight," said the colonel, and he shook Ned's hand warmly as he turned to go.

Rainbow was a splendid looking animal, and Ned felt that he would serve him fully as well as had Phantom, if not better.

The command was already out of sight, but striking a gallop, Ned came in sight

of them before they had gotten a dozen miles from the fort.

The major was true to his record as a hard rider, for he was keeping the command up to a steady trot.

As Ned came up to the column he could not but feel the martial spirit of the scene, a cavalry battalion upon the march.

There were three hundred cavalymen, two light guns, six-pounders, with their caissons, fifty pack animals, and half a dozen ambulances drawn by four fine mules each.

The rattle of the sabers, ring of spurs, hoof-falls of the horses, and silence of the men, deeply impressed Ned Duncan, and the feeling of awe had crept over him again when he rode to the front and joined the major.

That officer received him pleasantly, and said:

"I wished to have a talk with you, Duncan, but the colonel told me you were so dead beat he would not allow you to be disturbed."

"He was very kind, sir."

"He said that you had ridden some two hundred miles in about thirty hours, and had two brushes with the redskins as well."

"Yes, sir; but I could not remain behind, and I'm completely refreshed now, sir."

"You're game, I see; but tell me now just where you left Cody and the numbers of the Indians you saw, with the reasons of the scout for thinking they were to move in large force, for I must confess all seems quiet up toward the Indian country, and the scouts have reported no signs since Buffalo Bill left the fort."

"His idea was, sir, that the renegade chief would not be so far away from his village unless he had other bands of considerable number following."

"That is true."

"There were about fifty with the renegade, and Buffalo Bill said they were in light marching order, as he expressed it, so there must be others near with supplies."

"Sure."

"He checked them at the Red Pass to gain time, sent word to the Wynkoop Valley settlement to be on their guard, and I took the news to Valley Farms, where I live, while he remained in the basin to watch the Indians."

"We'll find him at the range then, and if we can only flank the basin and get a force round to hold Red Pass we'll give Mr. Lo something to remember," said the major.

"That is what Buffalo Bill said, sir."

"But he had a redskin prisoner, sir."

"Ah! how did he catch him?"

Ned explained, and the major said:

"The trouble is that a redskin will die before he will tell tales on his people, so Cody will get nothing of value from him as to the force of the redskins or their intentions."

"You have performed a very wonderful deed, my boy, in the ride you have made, and if Buffalo Bill is to be your tutor you have a brilliant career before you."

"Come with me, for I will ride ahead to where Cody's Boys in Buckskin are leading and tell them to cut off every foot of the trail they can, and have two men push ahead to try and find their chief before we get up."

"Can I go on ahead with those men, sir?"

"Can you stand it?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then you can go."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ACT OF TREACHERY.

Willis Wynkoop's friendly manner toward the pard whom he had so recently intended to mark for life after a short while seemed so sincere that Hal Halpine was deceived.

In spite of the advice of Buffalo Bill for him to watch the treacherous boy, and his resolve to do so, Willis Wynkoop so well played the repentance act that at last Hal Halpine began to feel that he had become sincerely sorry for what he had done and so trusted him.

He even spoke in a more kindly tone of Ned Duncan, and as they rode along said:

"I think I begin to see things in a different light now, Hal."

"Our side did start the vendetta in the first place, away back in Kansas, and the Duncan party were but right to defend themselves."

"Of course, I cannot but feel bitter toward Ned Duncan for killing Ralph, but after all, it is best to let the fact that the Duncans are out here remain a secret and thus end the feud."

"That is by far the best plan, Willis, for all of us."

"It is hard for me to think so, but I feel you are right, Hal, and Buffalo Bill is right."

Talking thus, and sincere himself, it was not long before Willis Wynkoop convinced Hal Halpine that he had turned over a new leaf.

They had not long left their camp, and the sun was almost upon the horizon.

Halting to arrange his saddle girth, Willis Wynkoop thus allowed Hal Halpine to pass on ahead of him.

The latter had gone about a hundred feet when he heard:

"Stop a minute, Hal."

The latter did so, and turned to look back at his friend.

As he did so he gave a start of horror and alarm.

What he saw was Willis Wynkoop standing on the other side of his horse, his rifle resting across the saddle, and his eye glancing along the sights.

He was too late, for the instant that Hal Halpine realized that he had been caught off his guard by a traitor friend, the rifle cracked, the bullet was truly aimed, and the youth dropped from his saddle and lay motionless in the trail, while his horse bounded away in alarm.

"Fool!"

"Did he think I would let him live with the secret he holds against me?"

"Why, he would have told the boys at once of my intention to mark him, and how Buffalo Bill marked me, and I would no longer have ruled."

"Let him lie there for the wolves, and I will tell my story when I go in."

"But I must first see Scott Jerome, the guide."

"I'll warn him that Buffalo Bill has sent for troops, and that will prove to him that I am his friend."

"I do not believe the guide has more redskins than those we saw at Red Pass, and so the settlement is not in danger."

"I will go there after I have seen Jerome, for he will know that I am his friend then."

"And I'll lead him to make a clean wipe-out of the Duncan outfit."

"I may be a boy in years, but I am not to be downed by Buffalo Bill, the Duncan gang or any other foes."

So saying, having reloaded his rifle, he mounted his horse and rode on.

He halted and gazed down at the form lying in the trail, and muttered:

"He's done."

"The bullet struck him fairly in the temple."

"His horse will go to the settlement, I guess, but I'll be there soon after, or maybe before, and tell my story of Hal's having been killed by Indians, and my being wounded."

"I'll flank around now to get to the Red Pass where the guide is, and see if his braves cannot catch Buffalo Bill, as he will be alone."

With another glance at the form of the friend who he had so treacherously fired upon, Willis Wynkoop rode on until he came to a canyon running through the range.

It was dark now, but he knew that he could pass through to the plains beyond and then continue back along the range until he came to the Red Pass.

He had better sense than to go by night to the Indian camp, but would wait until dawn and then approach with upraised hands.

He wished to see the renegade guide, and he would risk much to do so.

The canyon he passed through at last brought him out upon the plains on the other side of the range.

Turning to the left he kept along the foot-hills and continued his ride mile after mile.

He knew that midnight had come, and felt that he must be drawing near to the Red Pass, so he halted, unsaddled his horse and staked him out, and spreading his blankets, lay down to sleep with no compunctions of conscience for the dastardly act he had committed, no regret for the one who had been so true a friend to him, and whom he had left lying upon the trail.

Whoever barred his way or gained his hatred was fair game to him.

CHAPTER XV.

TAKING THE CHANCES.

The coming of dawn awoke Willis Wynkoop and he sprung to his feet and gazed about him like one who did not fully recall just where he was.

Suddenly all the truth flashed upon him, and his face flushed and paled by turns as it came to him how he had broken all vows and turned his hand against his own people, in that he had pulled trigger upon Hal Halpine.

For a moment he seemed frightened and unnerved, but he rallied quickly, and with a light laugh said:

"It is my secret and I am not telling upon myself."

"If I can only get rid of Buffalo Bill I will be safe, and then the Duncans will once more feel the heavy hand of the Wynkoops upon them."

"The one that can help me to rid myself of that accursed scout is the guide, Scott Jerome, for he now has the power, so now to find him."

Mounting his horse, after eating a slight breakfast of provisions with him, he rode along the range to find the Red Pass.

He had gone hardly over a mile when he discovered some ponies feeding out upon the plains, and a mounted Indian was guarding them.

He knew that they must be near the entrance of the Red Pass, and he was glad to see that they had not forced a way through, so he could find the white chief.

His very ignorance of just what to do was a safeguard to him, for he rode boldly toward the Indian, his hands held above his head.

At first the red horseman did not see him, but he was not long in discovering him, and he gave a shout of alarm,

and begun to circle around the ponies to drive them into the pass.

Other braves came running from the pass, and all eyes were now upon the strange pale-face advancing so boldly toward them.

But his uplifted arms protected him, he was alone, and surely he must come upon an errand of peace.

Still, a dozen rifles were ready to send bullets at him with deadly aim should he attempt to turn and fly, or show any sign of hostility.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the Indians, and at last, when within a couple of hundred yards of the group, out from the timber at the base of the range rode a horseman.

It was the white chief. At sight of him the boy gave a glad cry and called out:

"Ho, Scott Jerome, don't you know your boy pard, Willis Wynkoop?"

"Ay, ay, I know you, Pard Willis."

With the answer the man halted and glanced suspiciously up the range and beyond the youth, as though dreading a trap.

"Don't be afraid of me, Scott, for I'm your friend."

"I believe you are."

"Did I not prove it?"

"Yes, you certainly did; but what brings you here?"

"To warn you of danger."

"What danger?"

The two were now within a few paces of each other, and Willis Wynkoop had halted.

He did not half like the scowling, painted faces of the score of warriors who had come up behind their chief.

"I came here for a talk with you."

"Who is with you?"

"I am here alone."

"Sure?"

"Indeed I am."

"Why did you come?"

"To see you."

"What do you want with me?"

"I've got something to tell you."

"You took big chances to do so."

"It is important—to you."

"Let me know what you've got to say."

"Do you know who you run upon in the Red Pass last night?"

"A couple of dozen settlers, I guess, from seeing you here; but I thought they were soldiers from the way they fired."

"You tenderfoots are learning to fight O. K."

"It was Buffalo Bill."

"The devil you say!"

"And soldiers were with him?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"Why, Hal Halpine and myself were up the country on a hunt, and we came upon Buffalo Bill and a kid from the Valley Farms settlement."

"Buffalo Bill and a boy?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"He was on your trail and meeting us he said you were bound for the basin beyond Red Pass, and we'd head you off."

"Yes."

"Well, we made for it, and he put us in position in the pass, and we fired upon you, but I did not aim to kill, you know."

"And then?"

"Buffalo Bill sent Hal Halpine and me on to tell our people to prepare for a raid—"

"Curse him!"

"Hal Halpine was wounded badly, and I had to almost carry him; but he died on the way, and then I came through a canyon last night to come round here and warn you."

"Of what?"

"The scout said you were but the advance guard of a large force of Indians who were to assemble in the basin, and then make a dash in two parties upon our settlement and the Duncan Valley people."

"How in the devil's name did he find that out?"

"He seemed to know it in some way, for he sent the Duncan boy to warn his people, and then told him to go on to the fort and tell the colonel just what he knew you intended."

"He sent that boy you speak of to the fort, you say?"

"He did."

"Well?"

"He said he would give you and your braves another check, and then the boy was to go with all speed, we (Hal and I) having started first."

"And Buffalo Bill?"

"He was to remain behind in the pass and watch your movements so he could meet the soldiers when they came."

"And you came here to tell me this, boy pard?"

"I did."

"You turned against your own people?"

"Oh, no. I thought you could capture and kill the scout, and would spare the Wynkoop settlement, and make a dash upon the Duncan people and wipe them out," was the cool response of the young avenger.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RENEGADE'S PLOT.

The renegade looked fixedly into the face of the youth, who calmly met his eye, and then he said:

"I believe you have told me the truth, boy pard."

"I have."

"It happened in the pass as you said."

"Yes, I know what happened there up to the time we left."

"And you came around here to warn me?"

"I did."

"How did you know I was here?" came the straight question of the white chief.

Willis Wynkoop did not flinch, but replied:

"When you attacked our wagon train some months ago we all supposed you had been killed, for there was a white man found among the dead redskins."

"His face and form were so trampled out of shape we could not recognize him, but all said it was you."

"Yes, it was a white man who was chief of a band of young braves."

"I felt sure he would be taken for me."

"We all thought so, even to Buffalo Bill."

"But that does not account for your coming here to see me, when you supposed I was dead."

"Buffalo Bill has a field glass, and he was watching you when you rode into the pass, and he said that he had believed you dead, but he recognized you at the head of the Indian band."

"I see."

"He gave us a look through his field-glass, and I knew you at a glance, so, as we were old friends, though you had turned against my people, I did not wish to see you captured and hanged by the soldiers."

"That was kind of you, boy pard."

"But you had some other motive."

"Yes."

"Out with it."

"I had several."

"Well?"

"First, I wished to have you spare my people."

"Yes."

"Then I wished you to make an attack on the Duncan settlement with all your force."

"I see."

"And I wanted you to capture or kill Buffalo Bill."

"What makes you so bitter against the scout?"

"When he came to the wagon train he caused trouble between my father and myself, and more, he says, because I protected you, that I am no better than a renegade."

The man was silent for several moments, and he was thinking deeply.

He could hardly doubt the boy, and yet he did not wish in any way to commit himself.

At last he said:

"As your pard Halpine died of his wound, and you come here, no word was sent to warn your people."

"None."

"But word went to the Duncan settlement?"

"Yes, and to the fort."

"And Buffalo Bill was to remain in the pass."

"Yes, that was his plan."

"My bands of braves will not all be here before midnight, and the soldiers from the fort cannot possibly get to the basin before to-morrow sometime, if that boy was the only courier, and doubtless he lost his way and would not ride very fast, anyhow."

"I can get my braves all ready by midnight, make a dash for the Duncan settlement, give up attacking the Wynkoop people, and thus avoid the soldiers and, wiping out Valley Farms, regain our country in safety and with scalps and booty in plenty."

The renegade had spoken aloud, yet not as though conscious of having done so.

Still Willis Wynkoop had heard every word he uttered, and said earnestly:

"I am so glad my people will not suffer through my warning you."

"Your people would have hanged me, had Buffalo Bill caught me in your wagon-train."

"But you warned me of his intention, so I escaped, and I don't forget what I owe you."

"But I happen to know that it was a very rich party that I was guiding from Kansas, that the men all have money and the women jewels, and your father is the custodian of all, keeping the valuables and gold in his large iron strong box made into his wagon."

"Now, I will not kill your people, but that treasure I must have, and you will arrange for me to slip into your house some night and get it."

"Rob my father and his people?"

"I'll do the robbing, and you only plan for me to get it without bloodshed."

"I have been a good deal around your settlement, and have noticed that you go about alone a great deal; so in a few weeks I will be on the watch for you and we will plan to get the treasure."

"Now, you understand?"

"I suppose I can do nothing to vent."

"Not a thing."

"Well, how about Buffalo Bill?"

"He is in the pass, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall send a score of my braves around the way you came, and we'll catch him, between that party and mine."

"Yes."

"The braves can go with you as far as where you turn off?"

"Yes."

"Did you bury your pard?"

"No; I'll take his body home with me on my way back."

"If the coyotes have not picked his bones clean."

"I never thought of that," and the boy shuddered.

"And, remember, in going home, you are to warn your people?"

"Yes; but you will not attack the valley."

"No; I will make it the Duncan Valley this time, and later will visit you to get the treasure."

"All right."

The renegade then turned to his braves and talked earnestly with them in their own language for a few minutes, and the cunning boy saw that they were listening to words of praise the chief was speaking of him.

At length the renegade said:

"I will send twenty braves around with you, to cut off Buffalo Bill in the pass, and the young chief can speak fair English."

"You direct him how to go when you branch off to your home."

"I will."

"Expect to see me in a few weeks, and know that Buffalo Bill has met his doom, and the Duncan settlement is wiped out."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FALSE ALARM.

The renegade chief was satisfied with his compact with Willis Wynkoop.

When he had been the guide of the Wynkoop wagon train, the boy had been his constant companion.

That he owed his life to the youth he well knew, for had he not warned him that Buffalo Bill had come to the train and denounced him as a traitor, leading all into a trap he had set for them, he would have been hanged by the angry settlers as soon as he came back to the camp.

The renegade could not but feel gratitude, therefore, to Willis Wynkoop.

Feeling that the boy had told him only the truth in what he had said about Buffalo Bill being in the pass, and the warning sent the fort and the settlements, the renegade was more than content at his escape from a trap.

The Duncan Valley people, he knew, were rich, and he would make a grand haul in attacking them.

Without having to divide the Indian force, he could hurl them all upon the Valley Farms settlement and simply wipe it out.

If the other settlement escaped, he was satisfied, for he had planned to get what he needed most—the treasure of the Wynkoop people—and with this in his possession he would gladly take flight from that country and enjoy himself where he was not known.

By going to the Valley Farms settlement alone, he would thus avoid the soldiers and escape to his mountain fastnesses with his booty and scalps, and meet only with such losses as the braves would suffer in the attack on the settlers.

Confident of catching Buffalo Bill in Red Pass, the renegade had gladly sent the young chief and twenty braves around to go in at the other end, while he and as many more of his warriors advanced from the end where they then were.

He had made no other attack, after being again thwarted in breaking through, and confident that the brave sent on ahead had been captured or killed by the scout.

His other bands would soon begin to come up, and then he would be ready to strike his blow against Valley Farms before the soldiers came up.

And, with Buffalo Bill a prisoner, or dead, the soldiers could not do otherwise than give chase, and not be able to head them off on their ride to the settlement.

Thus did the renegade chief feel that he had all going his way.

In the meanwhile Willis Wynkoop and the Indians were riding along at a brisk trot.

The youth was by the side of the young chief, and was talking with him as well as he could with the English words at the command of the Indian.

The youth felt satisfied at the renegade's not attacking the Wynkoop settlement, and, though he regretted that the settlers must lose their treasure, his father most of all, he made up his mind that he would first secure a fair share of the money and hide it away for himself.

What pleased him most was that Buffalo Bill was to be done for, and the Duncan people wiped out, so he would have his full revenge.

Then, as Hal Halpine was out of the way, he would have no one who could say a word against him.

When he left the Indians, where they turned off to go and brave the scout in the pass, he would then dash on, tell of the fight with the redskins, that Hal Halpine had died of his wound, that the Indians would doubtless make a raid on the valley, and then get all the credit for giving the alarm, and for having been the hero of a fight with redskins.

If they cared to go out after the body of Hal Halpine after the alarm was over, he would guide them to where the youth had fallen, and the coyotes would have done their work well by that time.

Thus argued the wicked boy as he rode on with the young Indian chief.

The latter was watchful of every sign along the way, and once halted at a trail, and the braves all had a talk over it, which Willis Wynkoop did not understand.

The canyon was reached, and through it the redskins went to the basin beyond.

Here Willis halted, and told the young chief that his way lay to the left, while they must turn sharply to the right and follow along the base of the range until they came to the Red Pass.

They would arrive there in a couple of hours, he gave them to understand, and further along they would come to the trail of his and his dead companion's horses.

There he parted, with a handshake all around, and rode on his way once more.

He was half tempted to go by the spot where Hal Halpine had fallen, but he seemed to dread doing so, and rode on his way, giving the place a wide berth.

After a while he halted on a small stream, watered his horse, staked him out, and then cooked for himself a dinner of bacon, coffee, and the steak of an antelope he had shot when with the Indians, giving them all but a meal for himself.

This over with, he once more mounted his horse and settled himself for a hard ride to the settlement.

His intention was to take his horse into the valley with every appearance of having been hard ridden, and spread the alarm, calling all to arms, as he sped by cabin after cabin in the settlement.

He had a tragic story to tell of fights with the Indians, receiving a bullet through his ear, Hal Halpine's being killed, and that the redskins, in large force, under the renegade settler had believed dead, were to swoop down upon

the settlement, unless Buffalo Bill got help from the fort.

So on he dashed, and his horse was fairly staggering with weakness when he rode into the lower end of the valley and shouted as he neared the first cabin:

"To arms, men, to arms!"

"The Indians are coming in large force to attack us!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VERY CLOSE CALL.

The shot that Willis Wynkoop fired so treacherously at his friend Hal Halpine was not a fatal one.

It had been well intended to be so, and the aim had been true, but a slight turn of the head, when Hal Halpine saw the puff of smoke from the rifle muzzle, had caused the bullet to strike him on the hard point of the bone just over the eye and under the temple.

The blow was a severe one, and knocked the youth from his saddle.

He fell heavily, and lay stunned and as though dead.

The bullet had cut the flesh to the bone, glanced, and sped on its way, while the wound it left appeared as though it had entered the temple there.

Had Willis Wynkoop examined closely he would have seen that it would take another shot to finish his dastardly work, and there is no doubt but that he would quickly have fired again.

But he was fooled by the motionless, unconscious form, and that wound in the temple, and he rode on, as has been seen.

It was a mistake that other would-be murderers have made.

Hardly had he been gone ten minutes before Hal Halpine showed signs of returning consciousness.

He breathed heavily, moved, and at last sat up.

He put his hands to his head, and one was stained with blood.

It took him some minutes to recall just what had happened, but soon he did so, and as his eyes roamed about he saw far away in the distance the form of a horse and rider.

He knew that it was his pretended friend.

He lay down again, fearing he might look behind and see him, and he did not feel equal to a struggle for his life just then.

At last the form of horse and rider disappeared in the distance.

Then Hal Halpine arose to his feet, but staggered from dizziness and weakness.

He remembered to have crossed a stream a short way back, so made his way there, and, to his joy, found his horse grazing near.

The animal attempted to run when he saw him, but the loose bridle rein caught on the limb of a tree and held him fast.

It was well for Hal Halpine that his horse was thus accidentally caught, for his rifle was swung to his saddle, along with his haversack and provisions, blankets, and whole camping outfit.

The horse looked sheepish at being thus cleverly caught, and humbly followed his master.

Leading him to the stream, the youth made him fast, and then begun to bathe his wound and his head.

The cool water revived him, and the wound was bound up with a strip of his handkerchief.

Then the youth mounted and rode on after Willis Wynkoop.

He wished to ride into the settlement not far behind him and denounce him to all for his treacherous act.

But, going to where he had last seen him, to his surprise Hal Halpine saw

that the trail did not lead to the settlement.

What did it mean? Whither was Willis Wynkoop going in that direction?

The experience he had had with the companion whom he had once had a deep appreciation for, had admired, trusted, looked up to, now convinced him that he was worse at heart than an Indian.

He knew that he must feel that it was a fight for life between them now.

For some reason he could not understand, more than that Willis Wynkoop wished him dead because he knew how he had been humbled by Buffalo Bill; he had been the victim of a deliberate attempt at murder.

Believing he had killed him, Willis Wynkoop had left him in the trail as he would have a wolf he had shot.

But why was he not going to the settlement?

After considering the matter over for some time, Hal Halpine dismounted, hitched his horse, and begun to climb the range to reach a high point which he knew would give him a view of the plain on the other side, for he must be going thither, as he had passed on into the canyon.

After a hard climb he reached the summit, and there beheld riding down the other side of the range the youth whom he now begun to hate most intensely.

"He can intend only one thing, and that is to join that renegade chief.

"That means mischief, I feel sure, and so I shall go down and stake my horse out and then await his return."

Having decided upon his course of action, Hal Halpine returned to his home, had supper, and then went back to the cliff to pass the night.

Nothing disturbed him during the night, and he slept well until daybreak awakened him.

He returned to his little camp, had breakfast, and then went back to the cliff, confident that Willis Wynkoop had not returned under cover of the night.

"No, he would not dare go to the Indian camp at night, and I am sure he waited until this morning.

"If the Indians move, I can get to the settlement in time to give warning, so I'll wait here and watch to find out what Willis Wynkoop's game is."

He had not been very long on the cliff when his eye detected moving objects on the plain far down the range and close to its foothills.

Instantly he was all attention, and after awhile made out that it was a party of horsemen.

They were coming along the foot of the range toward him, though yet half a dozen miles away.

As they drew nearer he made out their number to be twenty-two, that they were riding at a trot, and, save two in the lead, all the rest rode in single file.

Nearer they came, and Hal Halpine saw that they were Indians, save one, and that one he recognized as his now bitter enemy, Willis Wynkoop.

"I know his game now.

"He knows Buffalo Bill remained in the Red Pass, and he has seen his renegade friend, made some terms with him, and is going around to entrap the scout.

"I will just play against him," and, having taken another long look at the approaching horsemen, Hal Halpine descended rapidly to where he had left his horse.

CHAPTER XIX.

WARNED.

Being certain that the intention of Willis Wynkoop was to capture or kill

Buffalo Bill by catching him in the Red Pass between two bands of Indians, Hal Halpine lost no time in mounting his horse and riding back over the trail he had taken the day before when with the youth whom he now knew to be so treacherous and evil-hearted.

He knew that the Red Pass had high cliffs on either side that no man could scale, and that if caught there Buffalo Bill would be at the mercy of his foes, bravest of fights though he might make.

He was well aware that the traitor guide would be only too glad to kill the scout, who had denounced him and thus thwarted his intention of leading the Wynkoop wagon train into a trap.

Also, Hal Halpine was aware that it had been Willis Wynkoop who had warned the guide that Buffalo Bill was in camp, and thus enabled him to escape and save his life.

For this, and the fact that the guide and Willis had been devoted friends, the latter would not fear to go to the renegade's camp, especially when he could tell him how he could entrap Buffalo Bill.

All this Hal Halpine saw plainly from the standpoint he viewed matters, and his one desire was to ride back and warn the scout.

It was true that the settlement had not yet been warned of the intended raid of the Indians, but the youth decided that Buffalo Bill must first be warned, and then he could go to Wynkoop Valley, or be governed by what the scout deemed best for him to do.

So on he rode at a sharpening pace, anxious to get to the scout as soon as possible.

At last he drew near the break in the range, and, entering the pass, rode along at a walk.

He believed the scout was there, but he was not sure.

He did not wish to make the mistake of riding upon a band of redskins, so he kept a bright look-out ahead.

Presently the bend came in sight, and he went more cautiously, for he was not sure of what was beyond it.

A moment more and he saw the tall form of Buffalo Bill step out from the rocks, rifle in hand, and he could have uttered a shout of joy, but wisely refrained from doing so.

Buffalo Bill was surprised at seeing Hal Halpine return to the pass, and alone.

He had supposed that the two youths were then at the settlement they had gone to warn.

Stepping into the trail, as Hal drew nearer, he said quietly:

"Well, pard, you have done good riding if you have been to the settlement and back."

"I have not been there yet, sir."

"Ah! and where is that ugly-hearted pard of yours?"

"Do you see this wound on my face, sir?"

"Yes; looks like a clip by a bullet—or did your horse fall and you cut it on a stone?"

"It is the mark of a bullet, sir, and I will tell you about it."

This the youth did, Buffalo Bill listening with the deepest attention to the story.

"Well, for all that is mean and treacherous, that young fellow Wynkoop is the worst.

"So he has gone on alone to the settlement to give the warning to the people and lie about your having been killed by Indians?"

"No; he is not a dozen miles from here, and coming back with some twenty Indians."

"Ah! where did they capture him?"

"They did not, for he captured them, I may say, as he went through the canyon to the plains and then down to the end of this pass, where the renegade chief and his band are."

"By the Rockies! that means he is coming here to hem me in."

"Yes, sir; I so took it."

"Then I owe it to you that I am not caught like a rat in a trap?"

"I thought it best to warn you, sir."

"And I appreciate it, my boy; and, more, you deserve much credit for the manner in which you discovered the game of that young scoundrel.

"We will be friends, you may be sure; but now let us see what is to be done."

"Yes, sir."

"There were twenty braves, you say?"

"Twenty-one, sir, I counted."

"Well, the Indians that the renegade chief is looking for are about due, and when those that have flanked around get into this pass they will close in until they meet each other.

"Young Duncan can be depended upon, I know, and, if he got through all right, he warned his settlement, and that will prevent a surprise, while there are doubtless troops now on the way here.

"Let me see, they should be here by dawn in the basin, if Pard Ned made a good ride of it, and I believe he did, and it would be well to head them off and have half the force go around by the canyon and get on the other side of this range, so as to head the redskins off when the other half of the force attack them in the basin.

"This would prevent them making a dash toward the Wynkoop settlement, for those people must be protected, not having been warned, and also not being to blame for the acts of that young hyena, Willis Wynkoop."

"Yes, sir, for my folks are there, and they are all good people; but I feel sorry for Major Wynkoop, his wife, and Miss Hilda, that Willis should be what he is."

"It will be a good riddance when he is put out of the way of further mischief, which will be sooner or later.

"But I have an Indian prisoner here to look after, and we must be getting out of this before we are corralled here."

With this the scout went after his horse, and, having untied his prisoner from a tree, he lifted him to a seat behind his saddle, and, mounting, they rode out of the pass, Buffalo Bill remarking:

"I took the gag out of the red's mouth because it was cruel; but, as I dared not let him give a yell, I bandaged his face up, as you see, so he could not chirp a note to his comrades up the pass."

CHAPTER XX.

HALTED ON THE TRAIL.

Upon leaving Red Pass, Buffalo Bill halted suddenly and said:

"Say, pard, I think you can do what I wish done."

"I can try, sir."

"I will direct you so that you cannot miss your way across the basin, and to the canyon on the other side where the soldiers must enter."

"Yes, sir."

"They will be along by dawn, I guess; but you can get to the canyon before dark by good riding and take up a position where you can head them off."

"And then, sir?"

"If I am not mistaken, Major Brown will be in command, for he is always the one for such work, and you are to tell him that you left me hiding here near the pass."

"But the Indians will find you."

"Trust me that they do not, Boy Pard. You take the Indian here on my horse; for where I can hide myself I might not be so fortunate in finding a hiding-place for my horse."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the major from me that I captured the Indian, sent word to the Valley Farms settlement to be prepared against an attack, and that you turned back when on your way to the Wynkoop settlement to warn me that the Indians were coming around to hem me in Red Pass."

"You need not speak of your pard Wynkoop, as the major knows nothing about him, and we'll attend to his case later."

"Tell the officer in command that I suggest he divide his force, and, skirting around the basin, leave it by the upper canyon, and come down to attack at the other end of Red Pass, or be there to strike a blow when the force he leaves behind moves against them."

"This will prevent a retreat of the Indians by either of the settlements, and push them hard in their flight."

"Yes, sir."

"Say that I will be in hiding where I can get a good view of them; see their force, and will meet the soldiers when they are driving them."

"I'll remember, sir, to tell the officer just what you have told me," said Hal Halpine, glad to be sent on a mission of importance by the great scout, and also to be placed in charge of the Indian prisoner.

After explicit instructions to the youth, Buffalo Bill took from his saddle a bag of provisions, made the prisoner fast to the horn, so he could not spring off of the horse and escape, and then, shaking hands with Hal, started him off on his ride.

The youth looked back after going some distance, and saw that the scout had disappeared.

"If it was any other man than Buffalo Bill, I would be afraid he would be killed, left here alone and on foot," muttered the youth as he rode along.

The prisoner was securely bound to his saddle, but with a bandage about his mouth was forced to be silent.

His eyes, however, were bent upon Hal Halpine with a look of most malignant hatred.

Putting the horses into a lope, Hal rode on, following his directions from the scout without a mistake.

He crossed the beautiful basin, or valley, and came to the range of hills upon the other side while the sun was yet above the horizon.

The canyon was found without difficulty, and, passing through it, the youth reached the other side of the range just at sunset and went into camp right where he could command a view of all who approached.

Staking out the horses on the bank of a small stream, he gathered wood, built a fire, and began to cook supper, for he was very hungry.

Following the example of the scout, he tied the Indian to a tree, and then decided to take the bandage off his mouth, as there was no one near for him to give the alarm to.

When supper was ready, Hal gave the Indian a share of it, which was taken and eaten in silence and without thanks.

After securing his prisoner beyond all chance of escape, the youth spread his blanket and lay down to get what sleep he could, for he did not expect the soldiers to be along before dawn.

But he was mistaken, as he did not know how rapidly Ned Duncan had rid-

den to the fort, nor how hard Major Brown had pushed his force on the march.

It was about midnight when he awoke with a start, for he distinctly heard hoof-falls passing along the trail.

Convinced that it must be the advance of the soldiers, he called out:

"Halt, there!"

Instantly there was a scattering of several horses to cover, and then a voice asked:

"Who are you, now we have halted?"

"Are you from the fort?"

"We are."

"Who are you?"

"A messenger from Buffalo Bill."

"Now you're talking; but come out and show yourself to us."

Hal Halpine did what the cautious scouts would not do—he boldly left the clump of trees where he was encamped and walked into the view of those he had challenged.

"Here I am."

"You're all right," said a voice, and from several points of vantage rode four horsemen directly toward him, one asking:

"Now, pard, who are you, and where from?"

CHAPTER XXI. THE BOY FOES.

"I know you!"

"You are Hal Halpine!" cried one of the horsemen, as the four drew rein near where the youth stood.

"Yes, I am Hal Halpine, and I know you, Ned Duncan."

"Yes."

"I started for our settlement, but turned back to warn Mr. Cody that there were Indians coming around in the basin to catch him in Red Pass, and he sent me here to meet the soldiers, and I brought his Indian prisoner with me."

"Where is he?"

"Over there at my camp."

"Is Major Brown in charge of the soldiers, for Mr. Cody said he thought he would be?"

"Yes; but he will not be along for half an hour."

"You have news for him, I suppose, from the chief?"

"Yes."

"We are scouts of Chief Cody's band—at least, three of us, this other being a young pard whom you seem to know."

"We will wait here and find out what are the major's orders when he hears what you have to say."

This being decided upon, the scouts staked their horses out, wood was thrown upon the smoldering fire that Hal Halpine had built, and the party sat around it talking, but no questions were asked by the men in buckskin, except what they thought would be for them to hear.

After a short while Hal Halpine arose and called Ned Duncan to one side.

The latter followed without hesitation, and Hal said:

"It's only midnight, you say?"

"Yes."

"You must have ridden mighty hard to the fort, for Mr. Cody did not expect the soldiers to reach the basin before day break, and perhaps not then."

"I made a hard ride of it, and the pace of the soldiers has been a fast one."

"Did you warn your people also?"

"Yes."

"Well, I did not."

"Chief Cody expected you and Willis Wynkoop to do so."

"I know; but, Ned Duncan, I've got something to tell you, and which I do not care to have others know."

"Well?"

"It's about Willis Wynkoop."

"Has anything happened to him?"

"I'll tell you, and then you'll understand just what he is, and can advise me as to what is best for me to do, for I am sure, if Willis is not stopped in some way, he will bring the Wynkoop-Duncan feud on again, and you know all that that means."

"We, the Wynkoop faction, left Kansas to stop that deadly vendetta, and, knowing the part the Duncan faction has taken through all, I can hardly believe that you all dogged us out here to keep it up."

"No, indeed, far from it; for, now that you have said what you have, I will as frankly admit that my father and the others left Kansas that the hatchet might be buried."

"I am glad to hear this; but it is Willis Wynkoop who is determined that the feud shall break out again, but listen to what I have to tell you about him."

Ned Duncan did listen to all that Hal Halpine had to tell, of the influence Willis Wynkoop had held over him, and how at last it had been broken off by the discovery of the youth's treachery to one who had been his best friend.

He heard of the intended death shot, the going of Willis Wynkoop to the Indian camp, and its purpose, and how he had returned to warn Buffalo Bill.

"We have been reared as foes, Ned Duncan—brought up to believe that it was war to the death between the Wynkoops and the Duncans, and yet I admire and respect you, and, for one, I wish to end this feud."

"The very fact that our respective people left Kansas to bury this vendetta is proof that they are willing it should end, and I feel that you and I, who alone know the truth of the whole affair, can put the end to this killing," said Hal Halpine in finishing his story.

At once Ned Duncan held out his hand and grasped that of his former young foe.

He had listened attentively to all that was told him, and then said:

"I have more to tell, Hal Halpine, of Willis Wynkoop, and my first meeting with him out here, when Buffalo Bill saved me from a treacherous shot in the back from him."

"I will tell you just what happened, and how he sought to kill Buffalo Bill in revenge, and to thereby hide the secret that the scout knew of him."

"I was suspicious, so followed, and thus saved the scout from Willis Wynkoop's treachery, and you know what happened afterward."

"Yes, I am ashamed to say that I do."

"That is forgiven, Hal, and will be forgotten; but Ned Duncan has vowed to hunt me down, and to bring the two settlements into warring against each other; so we must do what we can to prevent him from carrying out his determination."

"I am with you in all that I can do; but do you suppose he will remain with the Indians in the basin, for if he is caught there he will be regarded as a renegade."

"Yes; but he is too smart to be caught there, as I think he will make for the settlement as soon as he finds they do not catch Buffalo Bill in the trap he planned."

"But I hear the cavalry coming, and I will introduce you to Major Brown, who allowed me to come on ahead with the scouts, as we expected to find Buffalo Bill waiting for us somewhere before we got to the basin," and Ned Duncan led the way back to the fire just as Major Brown rode up and dismounted.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST BLOW.

Major Brown heard what Hal Halpine had to tell of what Buffalo Bill told him he deemed best to be done, and, with perfect confidence in the chief of scout's ability to know and plan well, he at once decided to divide his force and carry out the suggestion.

He immediately called for the men with the quickest horses to be the ones to make the ride around the basin and through the canyon to the other side of the range, and, having brought four pieces of light artillery along, he sent two with this force, Captain Plummer being in command.

The caisson and all else was left behind, so that a rapid march could be made, and Hal Halpine was to accompany the command, as it was his request that he might be allowed to do so, Ned Duncan remaining with Major Brown.

"You will reach the pass about dawn, by hard riding, Captain Plummer, so I will make into the basin and attack about that time.

"I will drive them right into the Red Pass, where they will doubtless make a stand, and, if you have gotten into position, we can hem them in and force a surrender."

"I will be on time, never fear, for I shall push on with the freshest horses, leaving those that give out to follow as well as they can.

"It is now just half-past twelve, five hours to daylight, and I have twenty-five to thirty miles to make, but a forced march will do it," and, mounting his horse, Captain Plummer called to Hal Halpine to ride along with him, and placed himself at the head of his two troops of cavalry and section of artillery.

Off they went in the darkness, two of Buffalo Bill's scouts leading the way, and the pace that was set was at six miles an hour.

This was kept up, and just at dawn the bend in the range was ahead of them.

A moment later there came the sound of distant firing, and Captain Plummer shouted:

"The major is upon them!"

At the same moment a scout dashed back and called out:

"The plain is black with their ponies, sir, a couple of miles down the range, and there are redskins running on foot to the pass."

"Yes, they expect to make a stand there; but we have something to say about that," and Captain Plummer called a halt for his men to close up, for they were stretched out in a long, straggling line.

The two pieces of artillery had kept well up, and the gunners were getting ready for action, while the troopers were dismounting, to give their horses a breathing spell, and tighten their girths.

"Captain Keyes, do you remain here, sir, and form the stragglers as they come up, until you have about forty, and then move out and surround those Indian ponies.

"The other men, as they straggle up, are to come on to my support, and you can mount your men on the Indian ponies, which are comparatively fresh, and send me every man you can spare."

"Yes, sir," answered Captain Keyes; and then Captain Plummer, with seventy troopers and the two guns, moved forward in close order.

Around the bend rode Captain Plummer, Hal Halpine by his side, and the pace was a trot as the mouth of the pass came into view.

Half a thousand Indian ponies were now well out upon the plain, huddled together, under a score of redskin guards, for all the others had rushed for the pass to join in the battle raging over in the basin, two miles away.

So occupied were the Indian guards in watching the pass that they did not see the cavalry until they had suddenly dashed out of the pines along the foothills and charged for the entrance to Red Pass.

At the same time they discovered that there was a line of cavalrymen under Captain Keyes circling around them.

With wild yells of rage and terror, as they were cut off from reaching the pass by Captain Plummer, they tried to stampede the ponies and break off with them.

But in this they were thwarted, as Captain Keyes pressed them too hard, and the score of redskins could only save themselves by rapidly dashing off on the ponies they rode and leaving the whole herd.

As Captain Keyes surrounded the ponies, Captain Plummer and his men dashed into the entrance of the canyon, and the guns were unlimbered for action.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOILED.

Major Brown moved forward with his command, after a couple of hours' rest and an early breakfast, so that his force, horses and men, were in much better fighting trim than were Captain Plummer's party.

The scouts were thrown out well ahead, and it was just before dawn that one of them came back and reported the Indians encamped in large numbers in the basin just around the entrance to Red Pass.

With this information Major Brown began to form his men in line of battle for an advance as soon as it was dawn.

But what had become of Buffalo Bill? I hear my reader ask with some anxiety.

He had seen Hal Halpine off on his errand to Major Brown, and, though left alone and on foot among foes, he seemed to feel no anxiety.

His intention was to gain a point of vantage whence he would be safe and could see all that took place about him.

To do this, he went to where the cliffs were lowest, and right where the bend was in the pass.

It was over the spot where he and the boys had stood off the Indians under the renegade chief.

Settling himself comfortably in position, he had nothing to do but wait.

Night was near at hand, when he suddenly discovered an Indian on foot and skulking through the pass.

Soon another and another appeared, and, as they advanced, they peeped into every crevice of the cliffs.

Then a dozen came into view, and all passed directly beneath where he was hidden.

They came from the basin side, so were the warriors whom Willis Wynkoop had led there to entrap him.

These passed on out of sight up the pass, and then came into sight the young chief, and by his side was riding Willis Wynkoop.

The scout laid mighty low, watching and listening.

He saw following the chief and boy traitor eight more redskins, mounted and leading the ponies of their comrades who were on foot searching the pass for Buffalo Bill.

At a point just beneath where he was in hiding the chief and Willis Wynkoop halted.

They were waiting for some shout or shot to tell them the scout had been discovered.

Hidden among the rocks, and with a pine bush over his head, Buffalo Bill could distinctly see his foes, not sixty feet below him, but could not be seen.

Presently a yell was heard up the canyon; then an answer, followed by a series of shouts, and there rode into sight the renegade chief.

About him were the search party, and behind him followed a large number of redskins on horseback.

The bands of warriors had begun to arrive for the attack on the settlements.

But the searching party for Buffalo Bill and the renegade chief had met in the pass, and the scout had not been found.

The white chief rode up to the youth and said:

"It's too bad that he had gone before you got here."

"I'm awful sorry," the scout heard his young foe reply.

"Yes; for he has gone to the fort for help; and yet it will do no good, for my bands are arriving rapidly, and I will start on the raid in the morning and sweep down upon the Duncan settlement.

"We'll get scalps and booty there—plenty of both—and I will let your valley go by; only, later, as I told you, I wish to get at that strong box in your father's keeping, and which you are to help me to do."

"Yes, I'll help you to get the booty if you will spare my people."

"I'll do it."

"But do you wish to ride on to the Duncan settlement and see me make clean work of it?"

"All right; just as you please, and I'll be along in about three weeks or so for the booty."

"I'll arrange for you to get it, though it is robbing myself."

"You won't suffer much, for you are not that kind."

"Have you got many redskins with you?"

"Yes; a thousand braves."

"I will camp half of them in the basin to-night, and halt the others out on the plain at the stream, for they will go up that side of the range and I on the other, to strike the Duncan settlement from two points."

"Make clean work of it, though you'll hardly catch Ned Duncan, as Buffalo Bill sent him to the fort; but I will catch him, for I shall be out with my band of Boy Regulators mighty soon on his trail.

"Now, I'd better be off, for you've got more Indians than I like to look at."

"They know you as my friend; so you are all right; but, in looking for your boy foe, don't forget Buffalo Bill, for he's the most dangerous man in this country."

"I'll be on his trail, too, and show him no mercy, you bet," and with a word or two more, Willis Wynkoop rode back through the pass, on his night ride to Wynkoop Valley.

And Buffalo Bill had seen and heard all that had passed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HEMMED IN.

Major Brown advanced his men slowly across the meadowland, flanked the ponies of the redskins feeding not far away, got between them and the campfires, about which five hundred braves lay sleeping, and, just as light began to glimmer in the East, halted for the death leap that was now to follow.

So quietly had the approach been made that the guards had not suspected the

slight sounds they heard as being an evidence of danger near, and not until the two six-pounders broke the stillness of the valley, and sent shrieking, bursting shells into the midst of the Indian camp, did the startled braves dream that death was upon them.

A volley of carbine bullets followed the fire of the guns, and then the firing became fast and furious for several minutes, when the order came to move forward and drive the Indians into the pass, half a mile away.

Not suspecting a foe there, and cut off from their ponies, while the fire had laid many a brave low, the redskins were only too anxious to retreat into the pass and make a stand.

Their renegade chief always kept his horse near him, so he had quickly leaped into his saddle; but in vain he tried to check the flight of his braves; for, though he saw that the troopers did not number one-third of his force, he was powerless to rally the dismayed braves.

Cut off from their ponies, many having lost their weapons, the pass furnished a safe retreat, so thither they fled, a panic-stricken horde.

And on came Major Brown and his men, the guns being pushed muzzle first by the gallant gunners, and hurtling death into the redskin ranks.

Over the dead and dying went horses and guns, and formed a line in front of the pass, into which there rained bullets and shells.

The now frantic savages were forced to retreat to the first bend in the pass, but hot on their heels came their relentless destroyers.

Suddenly there was a wild cheer from the troopers, mingling with the wild war cries of the redskins, for Indian and soldier all beheld the same strange sight.

What they saw was the form of the white renegade as he rode at a run beneath the low cliff at the bend, suddenly jerked backward out of his saddle, as a lariat noose settled about his neck from above; then the swinging, struggling form was drawn upward by an effort of giant strength and left hanging in mid-air!

For a moment on the cliff, hauling on the lasso, had been seen the tall form of Buffalo Bill!

And in that moment of death agony, as his eyes glanced upward and his hand tugged at the noose about his neck, Scott Jerome, the renegade guide and white chief of the Indians, had seen who it was that had thrown the lariat with such marvelous skill, and had thus brought his evil life to a close!

The sight of the form swaying in mid-air, held by the lasso of Buffalo Bill, was a startling one to the soldiers one and all, and an appalling one to the Indians.

Major Brown understood this humane side of the scout's nature, and called out to an officer near:

"Cody has brought the renegade to book, but will not fire on the redskins, I see, and that is proof to my mind we have them thoroughly whipped and cowed."

"But we should hear from Plummer soon."

Hardly had the words been uttered, when Ned Duncan called out:

"There are Indians dashing this way, sir, in large numbers from the other end of the pass."

"Then Plummer is driving them!"

"Steady, men, for the reds will try to dash over us!"

The cannon were now placed at the bend, the troopers were all dismounted and formed in line, protected by rocks

and trees hastily cut down, and all was made ready for a desperate rush of the Indians.

Then was heard firing, hot and fast, from the other end of the pass, and in one mighty mass the stampeded Indians came with a rush, only a few of them mounted, to break through the line of Major Brown.

But the guns and carbines hurled them back, and, in their despair, they turned and sped toward the other end!

At once was heard the roar of the field battery and the rattle of the carbines.

"Plummer is at it now. Pray Heaven, he check them!" cried Major Brown.

The firing ceased, and a wild cheer sweeping up the pass told the story, that Captain Plummer had hurled the red masses back, that they were entrapped, hemmed in beyond escape.

Then came a death-like silence, but it was soon broken by the clear tones of Buffalo Bill from the cliffs, calling down to the Indians in their own language and telling them to submit, and mercy would be shown!

"That is right, Cody! Make what terms you please," called out Major Brown.

And the words of the scout were listened to; the red raiders surrendered on conditions they were glad to get, that they should care for their dead and wounded and be allowed an ample number of ponies to bear them back to their villages, all able-bodied warriors being forced to go on foot.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SCOUT AND HIS DECOYS.

Having seen that the Indians were beyond all power of resuming hostilities, and Major Brown having allowed them to go out upon the plain at the further end of the pass to camp and prepare for their retreat, Buffalo Bill lowered the body of the dead renegade so that it could be taken from his lasso by men mounted upon horseback. That done, he called out to the major that he was going off on a special scout he would explain later.

He also called out to Ned Duncan and Hal Halpine, who were talking together, to come back through the Basin, bringing his horse, and to meet him on the trail to Wynkoop Valley.

As Willis Wynkoop had not been found with the Indians, it was certain that he had gone to the settlement, and it was Buffalo Bill's determination to check him in his mad career before the desperate lad could do any more damage.

So, back over the range went the scout, and after several miles' walk reached the trail in the basin just as Ned Duncan and Hal Halpine came in sight, leading Buffalo Bill's horse.

They gave a cheer at sight of the big pard, and, dashing forward, warmly grasped his hands, Ned Duncan saying:

"Hal and I are the best of friends now, Mr. Cody, and if we have our way the Wynkoop-Duncan vendetta will never be renewed."

"It will not be if I have my way, boy pards, and I wish you both to go with me to the Wynkoop Valley, where I intend to have my little say."

"I shall show Major Wynkoop that it was you, Ned, who saved the life of his daughter Hilda, when attacked by the lion, and that you aided in saving both his wicked son and Hal Halpine here from being killed by the Indians."

"I will then make known the true story of Willis Wynkoop's crimes toward you, toward Hal Halpine and myself, and his alliance with the renegade guide."

"As a Government officer, I shall then arrest Willis Wynkoop as a renegade and take him to the fort for trial."

"You two boys have been my noble allies, my brave and able decoys, and I will show the people of both settlements all that you are, and try and have them bury the hatchet, let the old Kansas feud be ended, and have the dead past bury its dead."

The two boys listened with deepest interest to all the scout had said, and they were both of the opinion, from what they knew of their people, and of the reason they had left Kansas, that all would be most willing to live in peace.

So the heads of the three horses were turned toward the Wynkoop settlement, and a halt was made at the first stream for breakfast and a rest.

The scout had called out to the boys to bring along a good supply of food, so they had a breakfast that all greatly relished.

Wishing to reach the settlement at night, so that Willis Wynkoop would not discover their approach, the scout decided that they would rest where they were until the afternoon, and then continue on their way.

Their horses were tired, they were tired, and the rest would do all good; so their blankets were spread, the animals put upon a rich grazing ground near by, and the trio were fast asleep in a very short while.

It was the middle of the afternoon when they awoke, had dinner and mounted to continue on their way.

They had proceeded a dozen miles or so, when Buffalo Bill remarked:

"Two trails cross above here in the valley, and by one you can go the shortest way to your settlement, Pard Ned, should I not return this way with you."

"It is a cut-off of thirty miles at least from this trail through the basin."

"I will remember it, sir."

"The other end of the trail leads to the Wynkoop Valley, and that is the way you and that wicked comrade of yours came, was it not, Pard Hal?"

"Yes, sir; but we didn't know the short cut you just spoke of to Valley Farms settlement, for we continued on this trail through the basin and the Red Pass."

"Willis Wynkoop had been this way before?"

"Yes, sir; quite often and alone. He had been watching his chances to kill Ned Duncan; or, in fact—"

Buffalo Bill halted and held up his hand for silence.

Then there came to their ears the sound of hoofs, but as there was ahead a clump of pines it hid from view whoever was coming toward them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BUFFALO BILL WINS.

This thicket was at the spot where the trails crossed, to which Buffalo Bill had referred a moment before hearing the sound of hoofs.

The keen ear of the scout soon detected that two parties of horsemen were approaching—one from the right, the other from the left—and knew that they must soon come into view of each other as they both emerged from the thicket.

Buffalo Bill and his two decoy pards had halted in the edge of a heavy growth of timber, where they could see and not be seen, and there they waited.

Soon there came into view a party of a dozen horsemen.

"Great Scott! they are my own band of Boy Regulators. They are searching for me, I am sure! I will hail them!" cried Ned Duncan.

But Buffalo Bill checked him and quietly said:

"Wait until we know who the others are."

As he spoke there came out of the pine thicket a dozen horsemen, and Buffalo Bill exclaimed:

"Why, they are masked—which means that they are outlaws."

"See! they do not appear surprised at the sight of your party, Pard Ned, so must have known they were near."

"Yes; and they are going to attack them!"

"Mr. Cody, those are Willis Wynkoop's Boy Regulators. I know his claybank horse, with silver mane and tail!" cried Hal Halpine.

"Then we must stop the fight between those two bands, for fight it will be! Come on, boy pards!" and Buffalo Bill and the three dashed forward at the full speed of their horses.

But the last band of horsemen, those whom Ned Duncan had said were the Boy Regulators of his settlement, had halted at sight of the others, drawn their revolvers, and, seeing that they were to be attacked by the masked horsemen, rode forward to meet them.

This seemed to surprise the masked riders, who were led across the front of the others, not directly toward them, by the leader on the claybank horse, and whom Hal Halpine had asserted was none other than Willis Wynkoop!

They apparently were anxious to feel the strength of their foes before they dashed into them, and perhaps might get worsted.

Seeing this, Buffalo Bill cried:

"Ride for it, Boy Pards! We can check that fight!"

But as the scout uttered the words, there came the cracking of revolvers, and the trio, riding hard to the rescue, saw a horse go down here and there, and the leader on the claybank fall.

Another instant and Buffalo Bill and his two pards had dashed into the fight, and in thunder tones came the scout's command:

"Hold! the one who fires another shot, I will kill!"

Not another shot was fired; and every eye was turned on Buffalo Bill.

"Off with those black masks, boys of Wynkoop Valley, unless you wish me to treat you as outlaws!"

The command of the scout was instantly obeyed.

"Boy Pards, hear what I have to say, and you will be glad that I have ended this fight before other harm has been done than the death of that vile fellow lying there, a few wounds, and the loss of several horses."

"You, boys of Wynkoop Valley, have been led away by your wicked young captain, whose deeds of evil I shall now make known to you."

Amid a death-like silence, Buffalo Bill told the story of Willis Wynkoop's crimes against Ned Duncan, his own comrade, Hal Halpine, and himself, and his alliance with the renegade chief.

Continuing he said:

"Willis Wynkoop, failing to entrap me in Red Pass, and believing Hal Halpine to be dead, went to the settlement, told his false story of being wounded by redskins, when I put that bullet hole in his ear, told how Hal Halpine had been killed by the Indians, warned the people to be on their guard, and, having made himself a hero, he led you, his Boy Regulators, out on a scout."

"Am I right in believing that he in some way discovered the presence of the

Duncan party near, and decided to attack them?"

"Yes, sir; when in camp, a few miles back, he went off alone and told us he had found a band of outlaws camping near, and ordered us to mask ourselves and attack them."

"Then he handed to each one of us a black mask, and we were riding for the outlaws' camp when we met what we now know to be the Duncan boys."

So answered, in a manly way, a youth by the name of Bert Smedley.

"Yes, they are the Duncan boys, as you call them, a band of young Regulators under their daring captain here, Ned Duncan, and to whom you owe it, by his riding to the fort for help, that your settlement was not wiped out utterly by the redskin raiders."

"I have already told you of Ned Duncan, and how Willis Wynkoop treacherously sought to kill him. You know him now as the one who saved beautiful Hilda Wynkoop from a fearful death, and yet that fact, known to her brother, he will try to kill her noble rescuer."

"The Duncans left Kansas, as did the Wynkoops, to end this fatal feud, and Fate led both bands here; but it was a better purpose than to have you still continue this deadly fight."

"If Ned Duncan killed Ralph Wynkoop, it was in self-defense, as you all know, and in return you now know that it was he who saved Hilda Wynkoop—that it was Ned Duncan who rode hard and brought soldiers to save the Wynkoop settlement."

"Who will be the first on either side to extend the hand of friendship?"

"I will!"

It was Ned Duncan who spoke.

"And I accept it!" cried Hal Halpine, and their hands were warmly clasped.

Bert Smedley was next, and so on it went, until each one of the Wynkoop Valley Boy Regulators had shaken hands with Ned Duncan.

Hal Halpine then told his story, and there were handshakes all around, while Buffalo Bill was looking after several slight wounds received by the boys.

Half a dozen horses had fallen under the fire, but it was fortunate that only one life had been sacrificed.

Who had fired that death shot, if known, was not told, but it was meant to kill, for it pierced the heart of Willis Wynkoop.

There he lay dead upon the field, the victim of his own cruel and evil plot.

He was wrapped in his blanket and buried where he fell, while Hal Halpine and Bert Smedley rode on to Wynkoop Valley with Buffalo Bill to break the news of his death and tell the story of the evil career of the misguided youth.

And slowly followed the two bands of Boy Regulators, no longer foes, but friends.

CHAPTER XXVII. CONCLUSION.

It was after night when Buffalo Bill and the two youths, Hal Halpine and Bert Smedley, arrived in Wynkoop settlement and rode straight to the cabin of Major Wynkoop.

There in the presence of the Major, his wife and daughter, and several of the settlers called in to hear it, the scout again repeated the long, sad story of Willis Wynkoop's crimes.

He told of the rescue of Hilda by Ned Duncan, and she at once vouched for it, and said that her brother had known all.

He told of all that Ned Duncan had done to spare his bitter foe, of the ride

to Red Pass to prevent him and Hal Halpine from being killed by Indians, of how the latter had been treated by his supposed friend, of the night ride to the fort for help, of the fight in the Pass, the capture of the whole force of redskins, the flying of the Duncans west purposely to end the feud, the determination of Willis Wynkoop to reopen it, and the attack upon the Duncan Boys, whom he claimed were outlaws, and then of his life paying the penalty of that last act of treachery.

"It was an act of Divine Justice, it seems. It is better so, and the memory of my poor, wicked boy must be blotted out of our lives, wife."

So said the consoling father, and the brave but suffering mother added:

"Yes, it is best that his life so ended ere more befell him and greater sorrow came to us."

"Not as what he was, but what I believed him, will I remember him."

Brushing his hands across his eyes Major Wynkoop added:

"It is for me now to speak, Mr. Cody."

"I will go with you and welcome that noble boy Duncan to our home, him and his comrades, for the past is dead and shall be buried in the grave of forgetfulness."

These noble sentiments of the brave Major were applauded by all present.

The feud was a feud no more!

Buffalo Bill and his two companions, on fresh horses, returned that night to the camp of the Boy Regulators to tell the good news.

The next day the young Regulators rode into the settlement, to be everywhere welcomed most warmly, and Ned Duncan was asked to become the guest at Wynkoop cabin.

But he said that he must return at once to his home, and when he did so the Boy Regulators of Wynkoop Valley went along as escort. At their head, as captain, rode Hal Halpine, while Buffalo Bill was the honored guest of all.

When the basin was reached the soldiers were still there, for the Indians had just finished burying their dead, and were starting upon their sad march to their villages, convinced that they must live in peace with their white brother.

Buffalo Bill had the Boy Regulators return with the soldiers first to the fort, and there gave them a sight of army life on the frontier; then he led them to the Duncan settlement.

The scout repeated the whole story to Doctor Duncan and those of the settlement he had called in to hear it, and as the Duncan Boy Regulators had been welcomed in Wynkoop Valley, so were the band under young Captain Hal Halpine greeted by those who had once been their foes, and thus was the borderland vendetta brought to a close.

Years later, as a fitting sequel, Ned Duncan claimed as his bride lovely Hilda Wynkoop, and Buffalo Bill, as Justice of the Peace, was the one who united two loving hearts whose paths in life had once gone such separate ways, to be at last brought together in happiness through the act of the great borderman, who to his fame as scout, Indian slayer and outlaw terror in this case added that of peacemaker and "Big Medicine" in a strange settlement episode.

THE END.

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